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William Dean Howells: A Critical Study

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS: A CRITICAL STUDY

BY

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY Delmar Gross Cooke

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WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS: A CRITICAL STUDY

I. THE MAN

The testimony to Mr. Howells' commanding position in the field of American letters is overwhelming. Only to indicate its diverse sources: two former presidents give him the very first place among living novelists; our editors strive to outdo in cordiality the veterans of their profession, all but unanimously hailing him--since the pun on his name has achieved banality--"the foremost American man of letters;" and a legion of fellow-craftsmen, many of them standing directly in relation of discipleship, even while denying that the new school tolerates discipleship, record golden opinions of him. Henry James, H. H. Boyesen, Hamlin Garland, Robert Herrick, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Edith Thomas, Arnold Bennett, Thomas Hardy, Edith Wyatt, Mark Twain, and others have from time to time expressed their admiration, or indebtedness, or both. Says Mr. H. G. Wells: "He stands in my mind with Dickens and Fielding, one of the novelists who have always been there from the beginning."[1]

But critical attention he has received in no measure commensurate with the high regard in which he is held. Thus Henry James was able to say truly, in an exquisite letter written on the occasion of Mr. Howells' seventy-fifth birthday:

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[1] "America's Foremost Man of Letters," a symposium in Current Literature (1912), 52: 461.

"The critical intelligence--if any such fitful and discredited light may still be conceived as within our sphere--has not at all begun to render you its tribute. The more inquiringly and perceivingly it shall still be projected upon the American life we used to know, the more it shall be moved by the analytic and historic spirit, the more indispensable, the more a vessel of light, you will be found.....But this appreciation, I want you to believe with me, will yet be carried much further, and then--though you may have argued yourself happy, in your generous way and with your incurable optimism, even while noting yourself not understood--your really beautiful time will come." No one has put the case so well; and from no one could it come so fittingly as from this late-lamented confrère, with his delicate recognition of the inadequacy of after-dinner laudation to forward the really beautiful time.

It is worthy of remark that dissatisfaction with the state of Howells criticism is almost as old as his reputation itself. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, writing in 1879, complains that "Each new book by Mr. Howells is received with an almost monotonous praise, as if it had no individuality, no salient points; while each story by Mr. James is debated through and through the newspapers, as if it were a fresh Waverley novel."[2] He takes into account the inborn modesty of our author, and the charm of his style, a combination potent to disarm criticism, though, truth to tell, the lavishly praised Howells style is in the finest analysis a revelation of its creator's temper quite consonant with the other elements in the synthesis, which in fact does lack salient points in a sense that James' work or Hardy's work does not. It is more interesting that Higginson was able in that

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[1] "Literary Recollections," a symposium in The North American Review (1912), 195:550.

[2] Short Studies of American Authors (1906), p. 33.

early day to regard his editorship of the Atlantic as an actual shield from criticism, for "his leading contemporaries are also his contributors; and for them to discuss him freely, even elsewhere, is like publicly debating the character of one's habitual host."[1]

This is by no means a piece of naïveté, as any one can satisfy himself who will attempt to list the leading contemporaries who were not personal friends or contributors to the Atlantic, then in its halcyon days. But the essential point is that the attitude is still maintained. The world has passed beyond those classic periods when it could tolerate a literary dictatorship, of course, but supposing a Boileau, a Gottsched, or a Dr. Johnson were demanded in the republic of our letters, there seems little reason to doubt that he would be Mr. Howells. Even his utterances without the province of letters, always inspired by a genuine humanitarianism, but not always justifiable or even matured, are received as weighty editorials. Throughout the long warfare he waged against romanticism from The Editor's Study, even his opponents and scoffers seemed to recognize something official in the character of his pronouncements. This deference, like the reverence for kings that smoulders in democratic bosoms, may be in part superstition, but it is none the less real, and it has a very palpable and substantial basis. Its roots strike deep into the solid rock of the man's attainment. The inimitable modesty and humanness of his autobiography, its light play of self-depreciation, its whimsicality and air of making an adventure of everything, mask too thinly the record of a career in which the gods seem to have conspired to make nothing capricious or inconsequent. A study of his career reveals only sturdy and substantial progress, rewarded by al-

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[1] Short Studies of American Authors (1906), p. 32.

most prophetic recognition, and confirms an impression like that in Mr. Wells' mind, that here stands one who has always been here from the beginning.

Whatever the intrinsic interest and value of his work, its final importance to the student of literary history, will lie very largely in its being a part of a greater evolution. Such visible insignia as he bears are seldom accorded those who have not established some vital relationship to the dominant forces in their time. To the realistic movement, as we loosely call it, which has consciously been forming world-literature for over half a century, he has established such a connection, and so far as relates to American literature he has played the leading part.

It is scarcely possible to doubt that the movement with which he is identified will be the determining factor in the literature to come. When we ask which way literature is going, our replies, however devious, cannot fail to take into account that revaluation of the facts of experience which the past half-century has accomplished. Veracity is no longer the watchword of a school; it is an ideal informing both our verse and our prose. There is no reason to expect that the novelist ever will devote himself any more than he ever has devoted himself exclusively to chronicling the noonday spaces of life, or that he will habitually seek existence upon the normal plane of the average man and woman, so incomparably incarnated in the persons of Basil and Isabelle March; but whether he seek high or low, he will approach his matter with a reverence for exactitude such as moved neither the great Sir Walter nor the apostle to Les Misérables.

Mr. Howells' influence on realism in America has been augmented by the condition already suggested, the authoritative characte

of his position, but chiefly, I think, by the fact that he unites the offices of critic and creator. The first of these offices, indeed, he affects to despise, and greater is the pity that so many of his commentators have been prone to take him at his word. His theory, however, I am convinced, must not only be taken into account but must be placed by the side of the fiction itself, if we are to make him an apostle of realism in a broad not an esoteric sense. To judge with reference to the intention is to project upon the man's work its unique illumination. The number of novelists who have divulged at any length the ideals and methods of their art, is limited, and still fewer critics have written novels to illustrate their theories. Further than this, an artist's confession of faith is the most explicit guide to determine his status in his school, and the key itself to his influence upon the younger generation.

This is all doubly true in his case, since his criticism of literature is so essentially a criticism of life. Indeed, it could not be otherwise, for as master in this more expansive domain he has sought and has been accorded his title. It may even be questioned whether any modern master, save Tolstoi himself, has insisted upon so complete a fusion of the ideals of literature with the ideals of life. Literature is life; life, literature: in no less lofty and inspiring a creed have the years of maturity confirmed him. This is what he had in mind when he entitled one of the later collections Literature and Life (1902). "If I did not find life in what professed to be literature," he explains in the foreword to that volume, "I disabled its profession, and possibly from this habit, now inveterate with me, I am never quite sure of life unless I find literature in it."

All the autobiographical documents, especially the intimate and indispensable Literary Passions, are clear records of a growth from literature into life, from books into the world from which books are made. This development, therefore, will be the dominant note in what little account appears here of Howells the Man. In this life, one of singular devotion to letters--unwavering, unreserved devotion, almost from the cradle,--we shall see him born of a reading race, nourished on printer's ink, exulting in the very smell of paper, obsessed by the printed page, gradually awakening to a truer literary sense. We shall see him climb down from the "very high aesthetic horse" which he confesses having ridden, draw near to humanity, and learn "to see books from without the library." We shall observe him emerge from the eighteenth century, his idol, Pope, crumbling in the dust; close his Thackeray; open his Tolstoi.

The autobiographical documents are happily as numerous as they are rich in interest and poetic grace. Besides My Literary Passions (1895), we have A Boy's Town (1890) which is in all essentials autobiography, thinly veiled by the use of the third person; My Year in a Log Cabin (1893), the most delightful of the sketches devoted to Ohio life; Literary Friends and Acquaintance: a Personal Retrospect of American Authorship(1900), the book of most intrinsic value, holding as its sub-title indicates, reminiscence of Lowell, Longfellow, Holmes and all that great New England group; and Years of My Youth (1916). Supplementary portraits of his father may be found in his introduction and conclusion to Recollections of Life in Ohio, 1813-1840 (1895), and the initial essay ("The Country Printer") to Impressions and Experiences (1896). Furthermore, as we read the various essays and sketches, bits of Cambridge, Boston, and New

York, we find them all more or less autobiographical. This is equally true of the travel books, Italian, English, Spanish, all of them. The autobiographic manner is inveterate; everything is projected upon the background of his own personality. When he contributes to a souvenir volume like The Niagara Book (1893), we can be sure in advance that that personality will be his contribution to the miscellany. Others deal forth history, humor, geology, description, according to their respective talents and interests; to Mr. Howells the most interesting object at Niagara and the one he is most master in transcribing is his own genial self. Niagara, First and Last, accordingly and characteristically becomes a chapter toward an autobiography.

To trace this strain through his fiction would be of more interest than profit, since it could but illustrate more fully what is evident at the outstart, his intensely introspective manner, and his practice of taking material exclusively from within the range of his experience. What a long but absorbing story, if one could be sure of it, to tell how The Flight of Pony Baker takes us back to a Boy's Town, with what characters and events the Boston where he made his Literary Friends and Acquaintance furnished out so many grown-up novels, what experiences in journalistic and literary New York went into A Hazard of New Fortunes and The World of Chance. But Mr. Howells does not make a practice of copying portraits directly from life, and too arduous an attempt to identify more than the color, the spirit, the types, the essential truths of his transcripts would result in an accumulation of fairy lore. Don Ippolito in A Foregone Conclusion is at once recognizable as the Venetian priest with whom he read Dante, but one should hesitate to say so, before knowing that he had confessed as much to H. H. Boyesen.[1] The life of Ferris

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[1] "A Dialogue between William Dean Howells and Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen," in Mc Clure's Magazine (1893), 1: 3.

in that novel seems true in its atmosphere to the life Mr. Howells must have led as Consul at Venice (there is an air almost of self-consciousness in the change of avocation from literature to painting, especially apparent in what relates to the development of new aesthetic ideals), and in virtue of this truth has its autobiographic interest, but it is not autobiography. Nothing unique, moreover, can be adduced from the habit of taking fictional material even directly from experience, because it is practised in all schools, although realistic doctrine implies it more certainly and more rigidly.

The habit of poetizing every-day existence and the tendency to introspection are evidently an inheritance with Mr. Howells. His great-grandmother once wrote to a daughter, upon some occasion of willfulness, that she had "planted a dagger in her mother's heart," which leads him to believe that this ancestress was not unacquainted with the romances of her day. It was from her, he thinks, that his grandfather inherited a love of poetry, rather than from the great-grandfather, who, although a Friend by conviction, must have had a somewhat worldly turn of mind, since he accumulated a fortune in the manufacture of flannels, which industry he founded in the pretty little Welsh town called The Hay, on the river Wye, and even made a prospecting trip to America.

The Grandfather Howells sailed for Boston in 1808, and, after peregrinations extending over New York, Virginia, and Ohio, with experiments in woolen milling and farming, settled in Hamilton, Ohio, as proprietor of a drug and book store, the only book store in the place. He was a Methodist, and, says his grandson, "kept his affection for certain poets of the graver, not to say gloomier sort."

Religion and poetry were both more pervading influences in

the life of William Cooper Howells, the father of William Dean. He suffered a season of skepticism, during which he vainly endeavored to get himself converted at camp meetings, finally espousing the doctrines of Swedenborg; and in that faith the children were carefully reared. It was an influence that dignified the home life, for there was nothing of fanaticism or of dogmatism in the elder Howells. He "despised austerity as something owlish"[1] and "loved a joke almost as much as he loved a truth."[1] It did, however, cut the family off from church going, their Sundays being enlivened only by occasional visits of ministers and by readings from the Book of Worship and the Heavenly Arcana. The children had their "unwholesome spiritual pride in being different from their fellows in religion, but, on the other hand, it taught them not to fear being different from others if they believed themselves right."[2]

William Dean was born on March 1, 1837, at Martin's Ferry, Ohio. Three years later the family moved to Hamilton, the "Boy's Town," where the father took charge of the "Intelligencer," Hamilton's Whig newspaper; but since he was a staunch Henry Clay Whig and Hamilton was overwhelmingly Democratic, the Howells family did not enjoy any decided change in fortune. They remained as always, poor as this world reckons, but never in want.

The boy was particularly fortunate in his home life. His mother, Mary Dean Howells, although she suffered on account of her housewifely instincts, often failing to view the crudities of their material surroundings in a poetic light, "was always the best and tenderest mother, and her love had the heavenly art of making each

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[1] A Boy's Town (1890), p. 14.

[2] Ibid., p. 12

child feel itself the most important, while she was partial to none."[1]

The dominant influence in forming his ideas, however, was his association with his father. They were the most congenial of companions, discussing literature and philosophy together as they went about their work. And although they differed in some matters of taste the main traits are notably similar in father and son.--the tendency to moralizing and philosophizing, always tempered by a fine strain of humor, the love of nature, even of the most common things in nature, and the sense of personal sympathy with men, even with the most common men. The son writes of his father:

"There was that in him which appealed to the better qualities of those he came in contact with, and made them wish to be as good as he thought them capable of being. He was not a poet in the artistic sense, but he was a poet in his view of life, the universe, creation, and his dream of it included man, as well as the woods and fields and their citizenship. His first emotion concerning every form of life was sympathetic; he wished to get upon common ground with every person and with every thing.

"But he had the philosophic rather than the imaginative temperament, and what he sometimes thought he wished to do in literature and art (for he used, when young, to write verse and to draw), he would probably not have done if he had enjoyed all those opportunities and advantages which circumstances denied him."[2]

At the age of ten, William Dean went to work in the printing office. "This was not altogether because he was needed there,

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[1] A Boy's Town (1890), p. 21.

[2] William Cooper Howells, Recollections of Life in Ohio (1895), p. IV.

I dare say, but because it was part of his father's Swedenborgian philosophy that everyone should fulfill a use; I do not know that when the boy wanted to go swimming, or hunting, or skating, it consoled him much to reflect that the angels in the highest heaven delighted in uses; nevertheless, it was good for him to be of use, though maybe not so much use."[1]

In 1849 the family moved to Dayton, where the father had bought out the "Transcript." This enterprise proved a total failure; and in the fall of the following year occured another removal, this time to a log-cabin on the Little Miami River, with the idea of superintending the "never-accomplished transformation" of a saw-mill and a grist-mill into paper mills. Of the rude but wholesome life there, Mr. Howells has made a most delightful record in My Year in a Log-Cabin. The boys, at least, incited by their father, entered into pioneer life with a zest and a romantic enthusiasm that made hardship and privation attractive and stimulating.

The Island was a most fascinating feature, appealing to the boyish imagination with a sense of mystery. "I do not know just how it is with a boy's world now," he explains, "but at that time it was a very dangerous world. It was full of ghosts, for one thing, and it abounded in Indians on the war-path, and amateurs of kidnapping and murder of all sorts." Often the Island resounded with the war-cries of little savages, who had tutored themselves in the ways of crime and depredation with Howe's Collections for the History of Chio and a book called Western Adventure from the Howells press at Dayton. A small gray pony was a favorite participant in these Indian dramas,

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[1] A Boy's Town, p. 20.

and figured as an Arab charger when the Moors of Granada charged upon the Spanish camp with their iron-weed javelins.

There was work as well as play; the boys labored manfully at clearing the woods of black-walnut, oak, and hickory, and at planting corn, melons, and interminable rows of sweet-potatoes. In all, the father was comrade and inspiration. The son tells how famously they got on driving the cow out to the new home, "talking of the wayside things so beautiful in the beautiful autumnal day, all panoplied in the savage splendor of its painted leaves, and of the poems and histories so dear to the boy who limped barefooted by his father's side, with his eye on the cow and his mind on Cervantes and Shakespeare, on--

'The glory that was Greece,
And the grandeur that was Rome.'"[1]

It is difficult for a boy of thirteen who talks literature and philosophy with his father, to be a bad boy; and it is not surprising that he should grow up kind-hearted and considerate, as well as imaginative and fanciful. Innumerable reminiscences striking an unmistakable note of sincerity, reveal the sensitive and thoughtful temper of the lad. Such is the following recollection of a rare moment, when returning with his brother from an evening errand to some neighbor's:

"The shadows fell black from the trees upon the smooth sward, but every other place was full of the tender light in which all forms were rounded and softened; the moon hung tranced in the sky. We scarcely spoke in the shining solitude, the solitude which for once had no terrors for the childish fancy, but was only beautiful.

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[1] My Year in a Log-Cabin (1893), p. 7.

This perfect beauty seemed not only to liberate me from the fear which is the prevailing mood of childhood, but to lift my soul nearer and nearer to the soul of all things in an exquisite sympathy. Such moments never pass; they are ineffaceable; their rapture immortalizes; from them we know that whatever perishes there is something in us that cannot die, that divinely regrets, divinely hopes."[1]

His introduction to literature was through the readings aloud in the family circle, that fine old custom which in these days is so rapidly wanning. In the Howells family this custom was an institution. The family library was by far the largest private collection in the town, and on week day evenings the Book of Worship and the Heavenly Arcana were displaced by the English poets.

His other real school was the printing office. Although he has in later years received honorary degrees from a number of universities, few men have been so completely self-educated as Mr. Howells. His formal schooling was irregular in the extreme, and he sets but little value on it. His earliest memory is of a sort of dame school in a private house. Then he came under the tutelage of a master who gave instruction in the basement of a church. Here he disgraced himself in spelling and arithmetic, but displayed a proficiency in geography which he confesses has long since been lost. As a reward for his attainments in that useful science, he received a History of Lexington, Massachusetts, which flattered him immensely, although he was vaguely disappointed in the book. At a private school known as the Academy, he studied what was then called Philosophy, learning from the pictures such valuable bits of information as "you could not

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[1] Ibid., p. 44.

make a boat go by filling her sail from bellows on board,"[1] He did not see why. He then attended a district, or public, school, where the teacher led the life of an executioner, and where he "lived in an anguish of fear."[2] It was here that he discovered the part called Prosody in the back of his Grammar, and was delighted to find that "nature had not dealt so charily with him concerning the rules of prosody as the rules of arithmetic."[3]

Prosody was at once put into practice on subjects drawn from a book on Greek mythology. He even essayed a tragedy in the meter of The Lady of the Lake, one of the books his father had read aloud to the family. The plot, based upon the history of Julius Caesar as recounted by Goldsmith, featured the tyrannical teacher in the rôle of the great dictator, and was intended to afford the schoolboy conspirators an opportunity to wreak their vengeance in a sufficiently bloody manner. The piece, he informs us, was never acted, owing to some difficulty about the hayloft.

Mr. Howells does not consider himself particularly unfortunate in having had so little formal instruction. Indeed, it seems certain that, during the years of boyhood at least, he was receiving a better education than any of the institutions within his reach could have afforded him. Certainly his father's influence compensated amply for that of any teacher he might have had. Then too, the exactions of the printer's trade at which he worked from the age of ten, were of precisely the sort to supply the deficiencies of irregular schooling. Furthermore, this occupation was precisely the one to

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[1] A Boy's Town, p. 55

[2] Ibid., p. 60

[3] Ibid., p. 61

turn him to literature. He was not long in becoming composer as well as compositor. Then followed a wide experience in journalistic work, leading to a successful career as editor of newspapers and literary periodicals.

Hence, it is necessary to add to the personal influence of his father, the influence of his father's profession, which may be regarded as standing him in lieu of formal education. There are certain well-recognized advantages in journalism as a preparation for the literary career, but there are some equally obvious disadvantages, especially apparent when the journalism, though it be supplemented by the most rigorous self-discipline, involves a total sacrifice of university training. Much of Mr. Howells' contempt for academic criticism, for example, is based upon misunderstanding; all of his respect for it is based upon his personal respect for the men who have produced it, as in the case of Francis J. Child. His dismissal of research as a business having nothing to do with the appreciation of literature, has much truth in it, just enough truth to make the conclusions misleading. Likewise, his almost exclusive interest in the modern and timely in literature, and in the few really great masters of the past, who are timeless and always contemporary, leads him to a scorn of minor masters which does not contribute to a clear-sighted view of the great and the present.

The advantages of undirected reading, too are undeniable. Following one's own bent adds a zest to the acquisition of knowledge and quickens the faculties of assimilation. But there is a narrowness in it which is only of a different sort from the narrowness of the schools. The independence of literary judgment which it appears to foster, is apt to be rather an independence of taste than of judgment. The reader of My Literary Passions will find the title admir-

ably descriptive. Mr. Howells' early reading was the passionate adoration of one god after another, the passionate denial of one creed in order to subscribe to the next. He asserts independence of taste; but in matters of the intelligence he is susceptible to the influence of masters, a susceptibility more insidious perhaps, because wearing the air of freedom, than the blind worship of authority alleged to flourish in the schools.

In his account of his literary passions from the great trio of his boyhood--Irving, Goldsmith, Cervantes--to the last and greatest of them all, Tolstoi, we fail to see this deference to masters entirely outgrown; but we do observe the gradual acquisition of a guiding principle that operates in the selection of the masters and dictates the terms of allegiance to them. This is none other than the great principle of realism, to which he was first awakened under the influence of Heine. Henceforth he judges books more and more according to their truth or their falsity to life. But after all, Heine was with him but a turning point on the road, a parting of ways from eighteenth-century formalism, not the goal and final consciousness which he found in the great Russian.

The record of this progress is hardly separable from the events to be sketched here. "To give an account of one's reading," he begins the Passions, "is in some sort to give an account of one's life,"[1] and with him this is to give it in the truest sort. The simple annals of his boyhood and youth are made golden by books, evermore books. Only one who has felt in some measure the same transport, can fully share with him his ecstasies over the box of imported volumes with their saffron-colored paper covers.

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[1] My Literary Passions (1895), p. 1

"The paper and the ink had a certain odor which was sweeter to me than the perfumes of Araby. The look of the type took me more than the glance of a girl, and I had a fever of longing to know the heart of the book, which was like a lover's passion."[1]

The three grand passions of Mr. Howells' boyhood were Goldsmith, Cervantes, and Irving. Goldsmith's histories of Greece and Rome were precious mines of knowledge, and The Deserted Village became an established favorite at the readings by the home fireside. The Vicar of Wakefield is still for him "one of the most modern novels; that is to say, one of the best."[2] Goldsmith he finds endeared to us by his kindness and gentleness; these are what "make him our contemporary." "They are the source of all refinement, and I do not believe that the best art of any kind exists without them."[3]

His passion for Cervantes was a more ardent one; and, although he has not yet given us the life of Cervantes which he promised at the age of fifteen, the affection has been lasting. "To this day," he confesses, "I cannot meet a Spanish man without clothing him in something of the honor and worship I lavished upon Cervantes when I was a child."[4] The Ingenious Gentleman of La Mancha was his Robinson Crusoe. It was the story, not the literary qualities that enchanted him when he first heard it from his father, who sometime later presented him with the book, "the most wonderful and delightful book in the world,"[5] two stout little volumes in calf, destined to

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[1] Ibid., p. 140.

[2] Ibid., p. 16.

[3] Ibid., p. 17.

[4] Ibid., p. 23.

[5] Ibid., p. 21.

become his inseparable companions throughout boyhood. In fact, he can remember no time during his boyhood when he was not reading it, and at the age of fifty he found that "in what formed the greatness of the book" it seemed to him greater than ever. What forms the greatness of the book is its "free and simple design, where event follows event without the fettering control of intrigue, but where all grows naturally out of character and conditions."[1]

The third of the great friends, Washington Irving, was endeared to him early in life through the charm of the Spanish books, The Conquest of Granada and The Alhambra. He could not share his father's amusement in the Knickerbocker History of New York, but he liked The Legend of Sleepy Hollow and Rip Van Winkle. The Life of Goldsmith he very much preferred to the more authoritative one by Foster, for he found in it a "deeper and sweeter sense of Goldsmith"[2] This is strikingly true, so closely were those genial tempers allied, and we look for the same deep and sweet sense of Cervantes when Mr. Howells' life of him shall appear.

In 1851, at the age of fourteen, the boy went to Columbus, his father being engaged there as a reporter of legislative preceedings, and became a compositor in the office of the Ohio State Journal, at a salary of four dollars a week. Meanwhile he had been rapidly losing interest in having things read to him, coming to read more and more himself, so that he could let his fancy roam at leisure. He thinks he was beginning to read with a literary sense, that is with a sense of the author. "I was growing more literary," he explains, "and less human." The characters in books were ceasing to affect him as real persons, although he had moments of intimacy with Ulysses,

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[1] Ibid., p. 26.
[2] Ibid., p. 22.

for he had at last read Pope's Homer. He had become acquainted with Scott's prose, too, by this time; but Scott's novels never became a passion. One is tempted, associating his coldness towards Scott's romances with his adoration of Don Quixote, to pronounce the lad already a realist. Significant the preference undoubtedly is; but his actual and present interest was in literature, not life.

One may believe that for a boy of fourteen he was becoming very literary indeed, to prefer Pope's pastorals to Ivanhoe. The fact is, he became passionately enamoured of purling brooks, finny tribes, enameled meads, fleecy cares, and feathered choirs, not to speak of aerial audiences. He essayed an infinite number of imitations, most of which never reached completion. "They all stopped somewhere about half way," he says--"My swains could not think of anything more to say, and the merits of my shepherdesses remained undecided."[1] With all his later aversion to the romantic, Mr. Howells has kept a fondness for the artificialities of the pseudo-romanticism of the classic period, which make no misleading pretensions to reality. However seriously the ardent swains and their Dresden china shepherdesses may have been taken in their day, the modern reader is not tempted to confuse their Arcadia with any place on the habitable globe. Like the extravaganza in the theater, they may be relished, not as the pièce de résistance, but as dainty confections after the feast, by those who are "in the joke of it," as Mr. Howells is wont to say. When he came to read Italian literature, he found Tasso's Aminta and the Pastor Fido of Guarini, "divinely excellent artificialities." He is rather glad, furthermore, to have had Pope for an idol, because in imitating him he could not help imitating his method

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[1] Ibid., p. 49

of composition, which was essentially the method of intelligence. Further than this he is glad to have acquainted himself with the poetry of Pope, for, with all that we may say against it, it was, as a mood of literature, the perfect expression of a mood of civilization.

After the one winter in Columbus, the family moved to the village of Ashtabula, in the northeastern part of the State. The next removal, from Ashtabula to the county seat at Jefferson, inaugurated a period of further enlightenment, from which dates his interest in contemporary writers, and in periodicals, and during which he read his first literary criticism. His reading was turned in new directions largely through the influence of a series of literary friendships, some of them fortunately with men older than he, and of different tastes and ideals.

The first important event of this period was his suddenly, "without notice or reason,"[1] giving his heart to Shakespeare; and, although Irving, Goldsmith, and Cervantes kept their old altars, the worship in the case of Shakespeare "went to heights and lengths that it had reached with no earlier idol."[2] He found in the dramas many of the qualities by which he characterizes modernity, that is to say, the qualities that make literature truly great. As Goldsmith is our contemporary by virtue of his inherent purity, as Cervantes is modern and realistic in his spacious form, unhampered by the trivialities of plot, so Shakespeare is modern and realistic in his matchless individualizing of character, in his mingling of tears and joy, just as we find them mingled in life, and in the humor that pervades his work.

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[1] Ibid., p. 71.

[2] Ibid., p. 73.

Thus Mr. Howells describes his first impression of the reality of Shakespeare's world:

"There I found a world appreciable to experience, a world inexpressibly vaster and grander than the poor little affair that I had only known a small obscure corner of, and yet of one quality with it, so that I could be as much at home and citizen in it as where I actually lived. There I found joy and sorrow mixed, and nothing abstract or typical, but everything standing for itself and not for some other thing. Then, I suppose it was the interfusion of humor through so much of it, that made it all precious and friendly."[1]

The first literary criticism that Mr. Howells read was Lowell's; and he believed it implicitly, feeling that any question of it would be blasphemy. He obediently made his farewells to Pope, but he could not find it in his heart to like Spenser. For Chaucer he came to have a personal attachment, finding him very like Cervantes in "a certain sweet and cheery humanity."[2]

He became acquainted with Dickens through an old English organ builder, and revelled with a delight long since outgrown in the pages of that fascinating story teller, who then "colored the parlance of the English-speaking race, and formed upon himself every minor talent attempting fiction."[3] "The basis of his work is the whole breadth and depth of humanity itself. It is helplessly elemental, but it is not the less grandly so, and if it deals with the simpler manifestations of character, character affected by the interests

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[1] Ibid., p. 77.

[2] Ibid., p. 108.

[3] Ibid., p. 93.

and passions rather than the tastes and preferences, it certainly deals with the larger moods through them.....His view of the world and of society, though it was very little philosophized, was instinctively sane and reasonable, even when it was most impossible."[1] From Dickens he gained a conception of essential democracy, presided over by a just and ever-watchful Providence, and it made him very happy to believe in such a world, even though he found it already contradicted by his own small experience. He wished it true, and he found it true "with that truth which is at the bottom of things."[2] "In that world of his, in the ideal world, to which the real world must finally conform itself, I dwelt among the shows of things, but under a Providence that governed all things to a good end, and where neither wealth nor birth could avail against virtue or right."[3]

He had Thackeray also of the old organ builder, and by this time the literary sense which he first felt when he began to imitate Pope, had been completely acquired. In fact, his absorption in literature as divorced from life reached its culmination during the time of his infatuation with Thackeray--Thackeray, of all novelists "the most thoroughly and profoundly imbued with literature,"[4] who speaks in ink, not in blood, as do Dickens and Tolstoi. "Literature, not life, was my aim," is Mr. Howells' confession, "and to reproduce it was my joy and my pride."[4] He is at some pains to analyze his fascination with Thackeray's superior airs toward both literature and life:

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[1] Ibid., p. 96.

[2] Ibid., p. 98.

[3] Ibid., p. 137.

[4] Ibid., p. 147.

"What flatters the worldly pride in a young man is what fascinates him with Thackeray. With his air of looking down on the highest, and confidently inviting you to be of his company in the seat of the scorner, he is irresistible; his very confession that he is a snob, too, is balm and solace to the reader who secretly admires the splendors he affects to despise. His sentimentality is also dear to the heart of youth, and the boy who is dazzled by his satire is melted by his easy pathos. Then, if the boy has read a good many other books, he is taken with that abundance of literary turn and allusion in Thackeray; there is hardly a sentence but reminds him that he is in the society of a great literary swell, who has read everything, and can mock or burlesque life right and left from the literature always at his command. At the same time he feels his mastery, and is abjectly grateful to him in his own simple love of the good for his patronage of the unassuming virtues. It is so pleasing to one's vanity, and so safe, to be of the master's side when he assails those vices and foibles which are inherent in the system of things, and which one can contemn with vast applause so long as one does not attempt to undo the conditions they spring from."[1]

This boy did not know then, nor for long afterward, "that society, as we have it, was necessarily a sham,"[2] that snobbishness was not something it was possible to reach and cure by ridicule. "Now," he says, "I know that so long as we have social inequality we shall have snobs.....that it is futile to spurn them, or lash them for trying to get on in the world, and that the world is what it

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[1] Ibid., 129.

[2] Ibid., 130

must be from the selfish motives that underlie our economic life."[1]

Among the contemporary poets, he never ceased to read and admire Longfellow. Browning and Tennyson he came to know at the age of eighteen soon after the inevitable nervous break-down, during which he consoled himself with being a martyr to literature. Tennyson became such another passion as Longfellow, but nothing of Browning except The Ring and the Book seems ever to have made any great appeal to him. "One need not question the greatness of Browning," he admits, "in owning the fact that the two poets of his day who pre-eminently voiced their generation were Tennyson and Longfellow; though Browning, like Emerson, is probably now more modern than either."[2] Tennyson's Maud, which he read first, he thought indeed pre-eminently voiced his generation. "I suppose," he continues,"that at the time he wrote Maud he said more fully what the whole English-speaking race were then dimly longing to utter than any English poet who has ever lived."[2]

During the winter of 1856, Mr. Howells was in Columbus doing legislative reporting for the Cincinnati Gazette--and reading in the State Library. In the spring he refused an offer of $1000.00 a year as city editor of the Gazette, fearing that his time for reading would be curtailed. This act of devotion was soon to cause him regret, when he came to realize the vital connection between literature and experience. For the hour of the supreme passion was at hand, the passion that was to liberate him forever. It was time for the Spanish idols to be placed in temporary retirement, their shrines occupied by German gods. He was at last to learn at the feet of Heine that his ideal of literature was false.

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[1] Ibid., p. 131.

[2] Ibid., p. 155.

"I had supposed, with the sense at times that I was all wrong, that the expression of literature must be different from the expression of life; that it must be an attitude, a pose, with something of state or at least of formality in it; that it must be this style, and not that; that it must be like that sort of acting which you know is acting when you see it and never mistake for reality."[1] "He undid my hands, which I had taken so much pains to tie behind my back, and he forever persuaded me that though it may be ingenious and surprising to dance in chains, it is neither pretty nor useful."[2]

In 1859 Mr. Howells, as news editor of the Ohio State Journal, began the period of which he speaks as the heydey of his life. He met many people in Columbus society with whom he could talk literature to his full content; a world of amusement not hitherto enjoyed was thrown open to him; and his friendship with J. J. Piatt ripened into intimacy. It was in collaboration with Piatt that in the following year he formally began his literary career. But of more service in his advancement than the Poems of Two Friends, which they produced between them, was a campaign life of Lincoln. This work won for him a post as United States Consul at Venice, enabling him to spend the four years of our Civil War in that peaceful city, studying the Italian language and literature.

Before going abroad, he employed the immediate proceeds of his book in making a visit to the East, approaching New England by way of Niagara and the Canadian rivers and cities where he was to lay the scene of his first fictions. The young littérateur was by this time confirmed in the ways of hero-worship, and, recalling how truly

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[1] Ibid., p. 171.

[2] Ibid., p. 174.

this was the Augustan age of New England letters, we can imagine the raptures of this "passionate pilgrim from the West approaching his holy land."[1]

"Lowell," he recollects, "was then in perfect command of those varied forces which will long, if not lastingly, keep him in memory as first among our literary men, and master in more kinds than any other American. Longfellow was in the fulness of his world-wide fame, and in the ripeness of the beautiful genius which was not to know decay while life endured. Emerson had emerged from the popular darkness which had so long held him a hopeless mystic, and was shining a lambent star of poesy and prophecy at the zenith. Hawthorne, the exquisite artist, the unrivalled dreamer, whom we still always liken this one and that one to, whenever this one or that one promises greatly to please us, and still leave without a rival, without a companion, had lately returned from his long sojourn abroad, and had given us the last of the incomparable romances which the world was to have perfect from his hand. Doctor Holmes had surpassed all expectations in those who admired his brilliant humor and charming poetry by the invention of a new attitude if not a new sort in literature. The turn that civic affairs had taken was favorable to the widest recognition of Whittier's splendid lyrical gift; and that heart of fire, doubly snow-bound by Quaker tradition and Puritan environment, was penetrating every generous breast with its flamy impulses, and fusing all wills in its noble purpose. Mrs. Stowe, who far outfamed the rest as the author of the most renowned novel ever written, was proving it no accident or miracle by the fiction she was still writing."[2]

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[1] Literary Friends and Acquaintance (1900), p. 13

[2] Ibid., p. 10.

Introducing the timid pilgrim to this renowned circle, Lowell, although not yet at the zenith of his prestige, played the good angel.[1] He had already accepted some of Mr. Howells' verses for the Atlantic, after holding them long enough to ascertain that they were not translations from Heine, and was later to open for him the columns of the North American Review. His welcome and his friendship through succeeding years color not only the Studies of Lowell, but shed their glow over the whole of Mr. Howells' retrospect of American authorship. It is saying a great deal to suggest that in the galaxy of portraits composing the Literary Friends and Acquaintance, none has quite the same charm of intimacy as that of Lowell; the one of The White Mr. Longfellow[2] is certainly more beautiful, but we quite literally see Lowell with pipe and slippers, and this with no taint of vulgar gossip.

In this characteristic lies the essential felicity of the book as a whole; and I sometimes wonder if there is another volume of literary reminiscence so happy in its kind. The ego looms large; the page is besprinkled with I's: yet was ever self-consciousness so impeccably modest? Was ever intense personality more faithful to its illuminative purpose in projecting all upon itself in a homogeneous relief? And was candor ever so delicate, so fearful of conveying the unintended slight or giving a wound? One hazards little in predict-

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[1] For a selection from correspondence showing Lowell's sometimes undiscriminating fondness for his protégé, see an article on"Lowell and Howells" in Harper's Weekly (1902), 46: 101.

[2] "Something that Björnstjerne Björnson wrote to me when he was leaving America after a winter in Cambridge, comes nearer suggesting Longfellow than all my talk. The Norsemen, in the days of their stormy and reluctant conversion, used always to speak of Christ as the White Christ, and Björnson said in his letter, 'Give my love to the White Mr. Longfellow'"--Literary Friends and Acquaintance, p.208.

ing for such a volume a life at least as long as there shall be any interest in the men who made New England great in our literature.

This elect circle can no longer be affirmed the greatest force in our literature, nor can the lasting influence its spirit worked on Mr. Howells be considered in all ways fortunate. Nevertheless, as his instincts led him, it was the communion made for him in heaven, and it reenforced his native bent away from the current of Continental naturalism. We have had no group of equal distinction which so fostered that quality of exquisiteness, of superfine respectability, now almost despised, and with a measure of the same injustice in which literary New York then despised it, but which he was able to appreciate and to commemorate in its truly memorable aspect.

Before linking his destiny with the patriciate of Boston and Cambridge, however, he enjoyed the entirely fortunate years at Venice, account of which is given in My Literary Passions, and in the chapter "Roundabout to Boston" of the Literary Friends and Acquaintance, but chiefly, of course, in the golden book--Venetian Life.

Notwithstanding the fascination of Dante and mediaeval Italy, his interests turned more and more toward the observation of men and books of the day. And discovering the weakness of Italian fiction as a record of contemporary life, he devoted himself eagerly to the drama. Of all dramatists, he loved Goldoni best, and still regards him as the first of the realists, for although he lived in the eighteenth century, he lived to fight hand-to-hand with eighteenth century romanticism. "Because I have loved the truth in art above all other things," he says, "I fell instantly and lastingly in love with Carlo Goldoni."[1]

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[1] My Literary Passions, p. 208.

Three weeks after his return from abroad he came to New York with the intent to resume a journalistic career. He wrote editorials for different papers, mostly for the Times and the Tribune, and sometime in November accepted a salaried position on the Nation, which had been using his Italian material. The following year (1866), however, he went to Boston as assistant editor to James T. Fields on the Atlantic. He was evidently given a large hand in the conduct of the magazine, and on the retirement of Fields, in 1872, became, at the age of thirty-five, its editor-in-chief. Each of these years of promotion was signalized by a corresponding advance in his reputation as an author. The success of Venetian Life in book form (1866) was as instant as it has been lasting, and the reception accorded Their Wedding Journey, his first novel, in 1872, determined his career as a writer of fiction.

In 1881 he resigned his editorship of the Atlantic in order to devote himself exclusively to fiction, accepting a yearly salary from James R. Osgood, who disposed of the serial rights mostly to the Century. After the failure of Osgood, he joined the Harper forces, and in 1885 removed to New York. His contract with Messrs. Harper stipulated fiction only, but with some persuasion he was induced to take charge of "The Editor's Study" (1886), in which he waged his six years' critical war on romanticism. His contract terminated, he became for a short time editor of the Cosmopolitan (1892), but eventually reunited his fortunes with the house of Harper. They remain his official publishers, though he still occasionally serializes a story elsewhere, and since 1900 he has conducted the "Easy Chair" department in their magazine.

His reading, meanwhile, has tended more and more to contemporary literature, largely contemporary fiction of the realistic variety. He wishes he could call back some of the time he squandered on the classics. His counsel is to give no time to old literature except that of the greatest masters; all that one can get from minor writers, he maintains, can be had in fuller measure and better quality from the few really great ones. Preference for the second-rate, he regards as mainly an affectation of persons wishing to distinguish themselves from the herd. Schools and periods he would leave to the scholar, whose business is concerned with them. And he would remind the scholar that reading done in order to become familiar with a period is literally a business, a professional duty, in no way concerned with the love of literature. That must be a passion, not a duty. "Read the old masters," he advises, "and let their schools go, rather than neglect any possible master of your own time. Above all, I would not have anyone read an old author merely that he might not be ignorant of him; that is most beggarly, and no good can come of it."[1]

Of the American realists Henry James receives the most ecstatic admiration. "In literary handling," he says, "no one who has written in our language can approach him , and his work has shown an ever-deepening insight."[2] Unfortunately, Mr. Howells' estimates of his great contemporary lose much of their value as criticism through a tendency to lapse into unqualified laudation.

The French realists do not share honors with the Russians in Mr. Howells' affection, but the extreme slightness of their influence upon him is astonishing. This is almost shocking in the case

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[1] Ibid., p. 228.

[2] Ibid., p. 224.

of Balzac, whom such diverse moderns as Henry James and George Moore hail as the father of us all and the one who has "shown greater wings of mind than any artist that ever lived."[1] It is not so much that Mr. Howells objects to that in Balzac which George Moore admires, as that he approaches him as he does Thackeray, with distended and quivering nostrils, sniffing the air for the first scent of the "romanticistic,"--a very watch-dog of realism. His pairing him off with Bulwer[2] is quite the coolest instance of damning with faint praise that I recall from his survey of fiction.

In the Erckmann-Chatrian novels he found a "simple and sincerely moralized realism,"[3] comparable to that of the early Swiss realist Jeremias Gotthelf and to that of Björnson. But in the case of many more prominent French writers, the subject-matter repelled him, and he found it so far from being sincerely moralized as to be positively immoral. Zola he thinks nearest the Russians in the serious handling of his material--the most moral of the French novelists. But he cannot grant even to a Zola the use of such material. Zola is "indecent," not immoral, "through his facts." Granted the facts, he acknowledges his "epic greatness." The realistic theory of Zola and the other Frenchmen, in fact the great body of contemporary French criticism, seems not to have interested him. His own theory is derived inductively through a devoted, truly passionate study of Turgeniev and Tolstoi.

Perhaps we are forgetting the Scandinavian and the Spanish realists, but their novels and criticism have been confirmatory

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[1] George Moore, Confessions of a Young Man (1906), p. 70.

[2] Heroines of Fiction (1901), vol. I, p. 125.

[3] My Literary Passions, p. 225.

rather than formative in their influence. Valdés and Emilia Pardo-Bazán, he reverences for their theories as much as for their faithfulness in putting them into practice. His opinion of the Spanish realists in both lines of endeavor is the echo of that early preference for the Spanish drama; he is as fully assured of the superiority of Spanish fiction to French as he then was of the superiority of Cervantes and Shakespeare to Corneille and Racine.

Turgeniev he read with a "joyful astonishment"[1] at the perfection of art, with a rapture almost inexpressible. "I cannot describe the satisfaction his work gave me; I can only impart some sense of it, perhaps, by saying that it was like a happiness I had been waiting for all my life, and now it had come, I was richly content forever."[2] The dramatic method of Turgeniev he pronounces "as far as art can go," although he was soon to know a method that seemed to transcend art altogether.

What most impressed him was the conscientiousness with which the Russians handled their themes, uttering human nature in its every aspect, as the French professed to do, but in what a different spirit! The awful seriousness of their quest for truth saddened while it inspired him. His "gay American horizons were bathed in the vast melancholy of the Slav, patient, agnostic, trustful."[3]

At last came Tolstoi. It was, he feels, as if the best wine of the feast had been kept until the last. "As much as one merely human being can help another I believe that he has helped me."[4] "He has been to me the final consciousness, which he speaks of so wisely in his essay on Life.....The supreme art in literature had

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[1] Ibid., p. 223.
[2] Ibid., p. 229.
[3] Ibid., p. 231.
[4] Ibid., p. 250.

its highest effect in making me set art forever below humanity."[1]

Tolstoi's great influence was an ethical one, but Mr. Howells, although he says he no longer had any desire to imitate the methods of another, can find no terms rich enough to express his boundless gratitude for his supreme art as art. It seemed to him unbelievable that Turgeniev had not said the last word aesthetically, with the perfect transparency of his style, his absolute concealment of artifice. But here was no artifice to conceal; here was a style of equal transparency devested of all personality, quite without a manner, at least Mr. Howells professes himself unable to state what Tolstoi's manner is. "There are plenty of novelists to tell you that their characters felt and thought so and so, but you have to take it on trust; Tolstoi alone makes you know how and why it was so with them and not otherwise. This is the only trait I can put my hand on, this ability to show men inwardly as well as outwardly."[2]

One of the finest things about Mr. Howells' admiration is his acknowledgment that Tolstoi is not infallible. He detects the false note in the exegesis to The Kreutzer Sonata, which would apply "to marriage the lesson of one evil marriage,"[3] as truly as he feels the power of the drama unglossed in Anna Karenina. He admits the propensity of the master's overpowering ethical sense to get the better of his aesthetics. When Tolstoi casts his precious dramatic gift to the winds, lapsing into allegory, when his tales become parables, Mr. Howells remains firm in his conviction that the greatest art as well as the greatest moral power is in allowing things to stand for

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[1] Ibid., p. 258.

[2] Ibid., p. 254.

[3] Ibid., p. 256.

what they are and not for something else. The simple pathos of Palicoushka, the peasant conscript is worth more to him than myriads of parables. "The Death of Ivan Ilyitch, the Philistine worldling," he maintains, "will turn the hearts of many more from the love of the world than such pale fables of early Christian life as Work While Ye Have the Light."[1] It is altogether grateful to find this last and permanent passion, this most profound one, also the best considered one. It is truer criticism, and does more to win the reader to his cause than, for example, his laudation of Henry James.

It remains to close the chapter with his tribute to the ethical influence of Tolstoi's work, which it is impossible to refrain from giving entirely in his own words, since he has compressed it into a passage one of the most notable to be found in the range of his writings. Mr. Howells gives his almost entire assent to some of the books commonly least valued of Tolstoi's although he doubts and fears our ability to walk the narrow way of the Savior alone.

"Tolstoi awakens in his reader the will to be a man; not effectively, not spectacularly, but simply, really. He leads you back to the only true ideal, away from that false standard of the gentleman, to the Man who sought not to be distinguished from other men, but identified with them, to that Presence in which the finest gentleman shows his alloy of vanity, and the greatest genius shrinks to the measure of his miserable egotism. I learned from Tolstoi to try character and motive by no other test, and though I am perpetually false to that sublime ideal myself, still the ideal remains with me, to make me ashamed that I am not true to it. Tolstoi gave me heart to hope that the world may yet be made over in the image of Him who

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[1] Ibid., p. 256.

died for it, when all Caesar's things shall be rendered unto Caesar, and men shall come into their own, into the right to labor and the right to enjoy the fruits of their labor, each one master of himself and servant to every other. He taught me to see life not as a chase of a forever impossible personal happiness, but as a field for endeavor toward the happiness of the whole human family; and I can never lose this vision, however I close my eyes, and strive to see my own interest as the highest good. He gave me new criterions, new principles, which, after all, were those that are taught us in our earliest childhood, before we have come to the evil wisdom of the world. As I read his different ethical books, What to Do, My Confession, and My Religion, I recognized their truth with a rapture such as I have known in no other reading, and I rendered them allegiance, heart and soul, with whatever sickness of the one and despair of the other. They have it yet, and I believe they will have it while I live."[1]

The course of the passions is somewhat tortuous; but its main direction is evident; and in the largest view it represents the quest of an ideal, the pursuit of the Gleam. The early supremacy of Cervantes is at once symbolic and significant, significant beyond Goldsmith and Irving, to whom he was allied on the temperamental rather than the philosophic side of his nature, and to whom his external resemblance is more strikingly evident. Don Quixote in its idealistic interpretation may be regarded as the fanciful symbol of his own soul's adventurous wanderings toward an ideal that should satisfy and reconcile the aesthetic passion and the ethical; in its intrinsic nature it is truly symbolic of his deliverance from Pope into the hands of Heine, from literary formalism and pseudo-romance

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[1] Ibid., pp. 250-252.

to the poetry, the humor, the poignant sadness of our familiar world. It is significant that Don Quixote, with its spiritual, not to speak of its formal and technical leanings toward modernity, should have been his Arabian Nights, his Robinson Crusoe, his Ivanhoe. The period of Pope's supremacy over him was such a time of complete subservience to literosity as we should expect to precede the revolt. The enlightenment came when fully prepared for, but thereafter it was no less inevitable that Heine should in turn be supplanted. Heine's realism lacks constancy of mood; he is always up to romantic tricks. His poetry, his keen seizure of the matter-of-fact in things, his mastery of the art of disillusion, must have found rapturous echo in a spirit like Howells, but his humanity is too deeply poisoned with a ghastly irony. His intense personality must have fascinated irresistibly, but the brooding sadness was what our young poet reflected most consistently in his own verse, while the ironic turn in a milder and more pervasive form infected his prose. Heine hardly represents with him a complete liberation. That came with the realism of the Continental novelists. In Tolstoi, above all, he came at once upon a novelist of seeming finality in art and a philosophic mind large enough to accomodate and give abiding-place to all his ideas.

His problems, political, religious, and social are conceived in such an aspect of simple humanity and justice that their solutions, if attainable at all in our selfish world, must be sought in some such condition as the primitive Christian brotherhood which Tolstoi preaches. And if it is true that Mr. Howells is a pessimist, it must be because he has not followed the sublime consistency of his master's way; if true, it is because, the brotherhood of the world being still afar off beyond the bluest distance, he still doubts and fears our ability to walk the narrow way of the Savior alone. If he

does not have an adequate philosophy of life, it is because he has conceived the end without conceiving the means. What is true of his thought on politics, religion, and social morality, holds equally in in the sphere of personal morals. The supreme truth that realistic fiction has power to reveal is the futility of the chase after a forever impossible personal happiness; and Anna Karenina is its bible.

Several considerations, however, should qualify our expectations in regard to the visible result of such influence. In the first place, Mr. Howells came to Tolstoi too late to have retained any desire to imitate the methods of another. Secondly, Tolstoi is a thinker first; artistry has been added unto him. Hence, his profoundest effect must be sought on the philosophic rather than on the expressive plane. Jane Austen, to cite a contrary instance, is an exquisite artist, first and last; and if similarities to another's style and method are found in Mr. Howells, the likelihood is that they will parallel Jane Austen rather than Tolstoi. Thirdly, the life with which he deals, and the aspects of that life which he habitually prefers are quite different from those of Continental realism. His themes, as well as his methods, have a closer affinity with those of Jane Austen than with those of Tolstoi or Dostoieffsky. And finally, he is temperamentally more intimately allied with Goldsmith and Washington Irving than with the Continental masters. All these considerations make it hopeless to expect in his work any imitative versions of Tolstoi, for Mr. Howells has been above all things else true to himself.

Finally, it does not characterize the Howells novel to call it humane. It bears witness as well to its maker's shrewd and acute observation of the human scene, and to the romance and the diversion

he has found there. Keenly as he loves to make transparent the fact for the fact's sake, he is alert for the sentiment, the poetry, the humor and the sermon which resides in it, and, if we are to believe him, resides nowhere else. He is reticent, conventional, sensitive, sympathetic, personal, introspective, irrepresibly humorous, but genial is the word that best connotes his habitual and his most fortunate mood. Geniality is the qualité maîtresse that lends his work its tone and atmosphere, and that forbids him forever the field of satire. His attempts in that direction all have the quality of his father's characteristic rebuke on a certain occasion when Grandfather Howells had reported some juvenile indecorum: "Boys, consider yourselves soundly thrashed."

II. HIS CONCEPTION OF CRITICISM

The critical documents of importance begin with papers on Italian subjects, supplemented by articles and reviews on his New England friends and acquaintance, which began to appear in the North American Review during the 1860's. His regular book notices in the Atlantic Monthly begin with the June number of 1866 and extend to January, 1881, and all the while he was contributing other matter to his own journal as well as to the North American. During the year following his retirement from the Atlantic to devote himself more exclusively to the writing of fiction, came his first really audible and unmistakable revolt against the complacent régime of the established English novelists, the essay on Henry James in the Century for November 1882. Richardson, Fielding, Dickens, and Thackeray, all four were struck at a blow, in one sentence. It is all very mild to us now, who understand that these great novelists are not perfect models of artistry. But in those days such heterodoxy precipitated an avalanche of indignant protest. Three years later the battle began in earnest with Mr. Howells quartered in the "Editor's Study" of Harper's Magazine. These papers extend from January 1886 to March 1892, his occupancy of the Easy Chair dating from December 1900. Meanwhile, he has contributed voluminously to other magazines, his reviews in the North American being known to all who interest themselves in contemporary literature.

Fortunately, the best of his work has already been sifted

and collected by Messrs. Harper. The garnerings include: Modern Italian Poets: Essays and Versions (1887), forming what is so far his only comprehensive and systematic critical treatment of a literary period; Criticism and Fiction (1891), the heart of the Editor's Study discussion on these two topics; My Literary Passions (1895), the invaluable literary autobiography which appeared originally in The Ladies Home Journal from December 1892 to October 1893; Literary Friends and Acquaintance: a Personal Retrospect of American Authorship (1900); Heroines of Fiction (1901), two volumes collected from Harper's Bazaar, May, 1900 to October, 1901, a survey of English and American fiction; Literature and Life: Studies (1902); My Mark Twain: Reminiscences and Criticisms (1910); and Imaginary Interviews (1910).

In addition to these books of which Mr. Howells is sole author, the student of his works will take account of the great number in which he has collaborated, mostly by way of critical or appreciative introduction. His connection with the miscellanies and collections in a critical capacity began as early as 1860, the year of his first publications in book form. Those which by all means deserve a reading are the introductions to Mary A. Craig's translation of Verga's The House by the Medlar-Tree (1890), Hamlin Garland's Main-Travelled Roads (1893), Galdos' Doña Perfecta (1896), and Paul Laurence Dunbar's Lyrics of Lowly Life (1896). The most disappointing perhaps is the introduction to Stuart Merrill's exquisite translation of Pastels in Prose (1890) selected from the French. Mr. Howells was evidently touched by the beauty of this wonderful little volume, but his information on the prose poem, adequate as it may have been in 1890, is commonplace now that controversy on the matter burns widespread. Among other introductions more purely appreciative than en-

lightening, those to the various volumes of Harper's Novelettes may be cited; but an exception must be made in favor of the significant foreword to Southern Lights and Shadows (1907) in that series.

Another possible general division of the critical comment, one to be used with extreme caution of course, is constituted by the fiction itself. There are few novels in which some of the characters are not excessively given to conversation on literary topics. It is unnecessary to point out the danger involved in crediting Mr. Howells with opinions held by his characters, but the fact is that he has used the novel deliberately as a brief for realism. Consequently, there is unusual justification for illustrating his philosophy of fiction from the dialogue as well as from the structure of his stories.

The first question we put to any critic is "What of the function of criticism?" "What is the use of writing books about books, that is, what do you conceive to be your status in the world of letters?" Opinions on this matter are widely at variance, ranging from the most despicable to the most exalted. From time to time we find reviewers who, under cover of anonymity, confess their unworthiness of any sort of literary standing. Others, of whom Wordsworth, unmindful of his own distinguished service, is a classic example, merely stigmatize as an inglorious employment this writing of books about books. Our American writer Mr. H. C. Vedder resents such disparagement of "unoriginal" work, and asserts his position to be that of a respectable middle-man, a purveyor to the public of literary merchandise.[1] So great a critic as Matthew Arnold, while holding the function of criticism an essential one in establishing an order of ideas, in creating an intellectual and spiritual atmosphere indispen-

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[1] American Writers of Today, Silver, Burdett, Boston, 1894, p. 62.

sable for the highest type of creative work, thinks that "Everybody, too, would be willing to admit, as a general proposition, that the critical faculty is lower than the inventive."[1] Probably not everybody would, since as a general proposition the matter is scarcely intelligible. John M. Robertson, for example, in his Essays towards a Critical Method, (1889), refuses to allow the distinction between the critical and the creative, pointing out the propensity of the latter word, on definition, to dwindle to the mere invention of stories about imaginary persons. And the best critical intelligence of our time seems to proceed upon the Nietzschin dictum, "To value is to create." Mr. Paul Elmer More has said substantially the same, and Mr. W. C. Brownell in his already classic brochure on Criticism considers that art cognate with the other arts plastic and literary.

So it is indeed disconcerting at the outstart to find Mr. Howells not merely clinging as does Matthew Arnold to a traditional distinction, not merely lamenting as does Wordsworth the waste of time and energy expended in uncreative labor, but declining to enforce the claims of a respectable middleman, ranging himself to all appearances with that ignoble class first mentioned. We had expected hostility toward that variety of criticism stigmatized as academic, but we find ourselves plunged into a wholesale arraignment of "the vested interests of criticism," which too long have been permitted to insult and browbeat the young writer. So far from establishing the "current of true and fresh ideas" of which Matthew Arnold speaks so beautifully and so confidently, ideas with which the creative genius may deal divinely, "presenting them in the most effective and attractive com-

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[1] "The Function of Criticism" in Essays in Criticism, First Series (1910), p. 3.

binations,making beautiful works with them,"[1] criticism, we find, "has condemned whatever was from time to time fresh and vital in literature; it has always fought the new good thing in behalf of the old good thing; it has invariably fostered the tame, the trite, the negative."[2] So far from endeavoring "to see the object as in itself it really is,"[3] "criticism does not inquire whether a work is true to life, but tacitly or explicitly compares it with models, and tests it by them."[4] It actually "cannot conceive of the original except as the abnormal."[5] So far from its being the inevitable precursor of true creative activity, we learn that: "If literary art travelled by any such road as criticism would have it go, it would travel in a vicious circle, and would arrive only at the point of departure."[6] To come at once upon the worst, the critic is a parasite on literature, whose "only excuse for being is that somebody else has been."[6] Indeed, he is formally likened to a caterpillar:

"The critic exists because the author first existed. If books failed to appear, the critic must disappear, like the poor aphis or the lowly caterpillar in the absence of vegetation. These insects may both suppose that they have something to do with the creation of vegetation; and the critic may suppose that he has something to do with the creation of literature; but a very little reasoning ought to convince alike aphis, caterpillar, and critic that they are mistaken."[6]

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[1] The Function of Criticism, p. 5.

[2] Criticism and Fiction, (1893), p. 46.

[3] The Function of Criticism, p. 6.

[4] Criticism and Fiction, p. 46

[5] Ibid., p. 47

[6] Ibid., p. 37.

How is it, one hastens to ask, that literature flourishes today more luxuriantly than ever before with this canker at its heart? It is because, while the parasite may fatten itself, may even inflict pain, it is utterly powerless to effect any lasting injury upon the vigorous life-stalk which sustains it. It wounded John Keats, hurt him cruelly, but kill him it did not. Wordsworth and Browning were treated barbarously, but how long was their fame delayed? "Every literary movement," maintains Mr. Howells, "has been violently opposed at the start, and yet never stopped in the least, or arrested, by criticism; every author has been condemned for his virtues, but in no wise changed by it."[1] Although the trite, the conventional, the negative have always been championed, such is the vitality of literature that always the fresh, the novel, and the positive have survived.

It would be gratuitous to expatiate on the absurdity of such a nihilistic conception of the function of criticism. The case of Howells versus Howells is not in the least disturbing, since a man may choose whether or not he will take himself seriously in any given office, even though such a course is not open to those appraising his work. The motive for his self-arraignment is not unworthy, but the means are more than questionable. Who has not been dismayed at the pitiable spectacle critics so often make of themselves; yet to whom would it thereupon occur to scourge them by the naïve device of confounding their occasional antics with criticism as a genre of literature, as a creative spiritual force? Certainly not to Matthew Arnold, for all that the subtle poison of an untenable general distinction has been permitted to infect his otherwise well-nigh final essay. The end of this matter is that Mr. Howells may ask us in vain

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[1] Ibid., p. 39.

to believe that he has labored sincerely and devotedly throughout a long lifetime in a cause which he regards as utterly futile and unworthy of his talents. We only wish the evidence for his knowledge of literary history were as good as his intention. Here again it is ridiculously superfluous to call attention to the fact that while it may be true that every literary movement has been violently opposed at the start, it is at least equally true that every literary movement has been violently championed at the start. And the domain of literature has no peculiar monopoly of the very human condition that the conservative forces do have a certain advantage in the strife. To maintain that "just as many good novels, poems, plays, essays, sketches, would be written if there were no such thing as criticism in the literary world, and no more bad ones,"[1] is not very different from saying that the political evolution of the world would be what it has been if no one had recorded his thoughts on the subject of politics. John M. Robertson, nevertheless, (although he was not so seriously perturbed over the caterpillar as over the botanist, with whom we shall have presently to deal) has taken pains to remind Mr. Howells of the immense critical influence wielded by Pope, Boileau, Johnson, Lessing, Voltaire, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and others.[2] There is absolutely no reason why one should not carry the list back to Aristotle, who has recently appeared in the Saturday Evening Post as an authority on the short-story.

As to the influence of criticism on the immediate success or failure of a work, that is obviously a different matter, and one on which it is much easier to agree with Mr. Howells. No phenomenon

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[1] Ibid., p. 47.

[2] Essays Towards a Critical Method, p. 144.

he points out, is more common than the uselessness of criticism against a book "that strikes the popular fancy," unless it be its uselessness against a book that "does not generally please."[1] Indeed, we have seen the novels of J. W. De Forest slip quietly and certainly into oblivion, in spite of all Mr. Howells' pleading and cajoling, and, on the other hand, those of M. Pierre Loti triumph steadily and surely over the unanimous damnation of the Parisian press. But this simply means that the reviewer is not a dictator, and cannot arbitrate on the basis of his personal preferences. It does not mean, one may be sure, that he might as well be silent as speak the word for true merit. Émile Faguet, who is quite in accord with Mr. Howells on this point, finds therein great cause for rejoicing.

"Pour mon compte, J'en suis enchanté. J'aurais des scrupules de conscience terribles si je croyais que je pusse avoir une influence sur le succès ou l'insuccès d'un ouvrage. Car, dans ce cas, je ferais un assez villain métier. C'est le pain que j'oterais de la bouche de l'auteur qui aurait au le malheur de ne pas me plaire. Ce serait abominable."[2]

The French critic is able to view the seeming disestablishment of his avocation with a light heart, because he entertains no delusion that his particular literary form is the menial of another. "La critique est un genre littéraire comme un autre," he maintains, "et voilà tout."[3]

Even in this matter, however, our critic exaggerates his negation. Mrs. Gertrude Atherton, who, I take it, has not knowingly

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[1] Criticism and Fiction, p. 40.

[2] "Sur Cette Question: Quelle est l'influence morale du critique?" in Propos Littéraires (Paris, 1902), v. 1, p. 3.

[3] Ibid., v. 1, p. 5.

credited Mr. Howells with any good thing, holds him largely responsible for the "craze" or "fad" for Russian novels in this country. She is reported as saying; "Whatever any one says in a widely read magazine carries a great deal of weight. I remember that I used to read whatever he suggested. I read some of the Spanish novelists whom he praised so highly. But I never have been able to read his own novels."[1] And if I may add testimony to Mrs. Atherton's, I should like to acknowledge my indebtedness to Mr. Howells for introducing the work of Giovanni Verga at a time when he was known to me only as he was known to all the world, through Cavalleria Rusticana.

Given such a negative conception of the function and influence of criticism as Mr. Howells seems to hold, an inquiry as to its methods and criteria must seem superfluous if not impertinent. The logical method would be the immediate abandonment of the pernicious practice. Yet when we ask him point blank if critics like himself do not fulfil a use in this world, he replies, "I should like to think that, though I am not quite ready to define our use."[2] He even admits that critics have an obvious historical use, and that aesthetic criticism may perhaps have a "cumulative and final effect,"[3] though its efforts at directly affecting the course of literature are foreordained to futility. And a further inquiry proves that his notions of critical method do in fact display the same general tendency as his practice, a tendency toward the perfecting, not the abandoning of the art.

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[1] Joyce Kilmer, "An Interview with Gertrude Atherton" in The Editor (1915), 42:299. Reprinted from the New York Times.

[2] Criticism and Fiction. p. 39

[3] Ibid., p. 40.

The general method of criticism, Mr. Howells believes, should, in a word, be the method of science. Its aim should be to "place a book in such a light that the reader shall know its class, its function, its character."[1] Its purpose is "to ascertain facts and traits of literature."[2] to discover principles, and to report them. Criticism which fondly imagines that it can give laws must "altogether reconceive its office."[3] "It must reduce this to the business of observing, recording, and comparing; to analyzing the material before it,and then synthetizing its impressions."[3] It is a science, of course, as far removed as possible from Brunetiere's evolution of genres. It is a science of life, rather than of literature. The ideal critic will know life primarily, and will value literature as a record of life simply. His sole criterion will be its faithfulness to the life from which it springs. He cannot give law, he will not dictate law, and, in fact, law cannot be given to the creative mind, only to the imitative. He will be a "gentle, dispassionate, scientific student of current literature who never imagines that he can direct literature, but realizes that it is a plant which springs from the nature of a people, and draws its forces from their life, that its root is in their character, and that it takes form from their will and taste."[4]

In so far as this is a plea for dispassionate criticism, and in so far as it discountenances the subjection of a work of art to aesthetic law external to it, it is quite in accord with the best

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[1] Criticism and Fiction, p. 33.

[2] Ibid., p. 37.

[3] Ibid., p. 47.

[4] Ibid., p. 55.

critical intelligence of our time. To this extent, and just to this extent, it meets the requirements suggested by Mr. Brownell for a criterion free and eclectic and at the same time reasonable. Such a criterion, in Mr. Brownell's words is one "which is untrammeled by precedent and unmoved by change; which is strict without rigidity, and seeks the law of any performance within and not outside it; which demands no correspondence to any other concrete, but only to the appropriate abstract; which, in fact, substitutes for a concrete ideal a purely abstract one of intrinsic applicability to the matter in hand."[1] There is, however, one startling omission in Mr. Howell's theoretic statement, the critic's duty to judge the artistic performance.

We have seen how he allowed the idea of the parasite to run away with him, and here he has been led to a similar absurdity by his fondness for botanical analogy. He forgets that his conception of literature as a plant springing from the life of a people is merely a figure of speech, and proceeds seemingly oblivious to the distinctions between the biological and the social sciences. This naturally leads to a hopeless confusion between critical judgment in its legitimate sense and law-giving in the sense Mr. Brownell so justly condemns. Mr. Howells identifies the dispassionateness of the ideal critic with that of the botanist in the presence of his specimens. The ideal critic, after the manner of the botanist, makes it his business to discover and report. He realizes that "there is a measure of the same absurdity in his trampling on a poem, a novel, or an essay that does not please him, as in the botanist's grinding a plant underfoot

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[1] Criticism, Scribner's, N. Y., 1914. p.61.

because he does not find it pretty.....that it is his business rather to identify the species and then explain how and where the specimen is imperfect and irregular."[1] Here again, John M. Robertson, the most serious and penetrating critic of this phase of Mr. Howells' work, has taken great but maybe not altogether needless pains in exposing the fallacy, incidentally pointing out the inconsistency of the last phrase in the passage quoted above.[2] In this matter, as in the case of the caterpillar, one has simply to make an end by going to Mr. Howells' actual practice, where he may be found doing nothing if not judging, and sometimes, it must be confessed, giving a very accurate imitation for one of his gentle nature, of trampling and grinding underfoot. That is to say, he treats a book or a literary idea which he regards as poisonous, in an utterly different manner from the way a botanist would treat a poisonous flower.

Mr. Howells' arraignment of criticism as it is practiced is on the two general charges of dishonesty and superstition. The first of these vices is displayed in that criticism which judges a writer without reference to his aims, which essays the offensive rôle of instructor to the author, refusing to learn anything from him, which misrepresents his work by magnifying minor faults into important ones, which descends to personalities, or which, at its worst, adopts the brutal method of satire, either for self-glory, or for spite and prejudice, or from mere habit, or in accordance with the policy of some particular journal. It goes without saying that if we are to have perfect honesty, the one thing needful is a critical conscience, but among the more formal and specific deterrents, Mr.

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[1] Criticism and Fiction, p. 30.

[2] Essays Towards a Critical Method, pp. 123-125.

Howells has emphasized the total abolition of the anonymous review, and the revival of the fine old custom of quotational criticism as practiced by Hunt, Lamb, and Hazlitt.

"He would even go so far as to say that there was no just and honest criticism without quotation. The critic was bound to make out his case, or else abdicate his function, and he could not make out his case, either for or against an author, without calling him in to testify."[1]

Superstition reverences the classics as infallible, attempts to set up minor works as classics, and misleads by judging literature with reference to models and to laws derived from the classics. The last offence is as we have seen the bulwark of a school of criticism so unpopular nowadays that to assail it seems like fighting a phantom. It is by no means easy to say,however,precisely when a reverence for the classics becomes superstitious,or precisely where the revivifying historic imagination of the scholar overreaches itself and plays tricks with rational aesthetics. The two things are constantly happening,nevertheless,and Mr. Howells is quite warranted in objecting to an absurd idolatry which looks upon the great ones as altogether perfect and that bids us admire beauties in literature which, however useful to the historian,is barren aesthetically. "At least three-fifths of the literature called classic,in all languages he estimates, or perhaps overestimates, "no more lives than the poems and stories that perish monthly in our magazines. It is all printed and reprinted, generation after generation, century after century; but it is not alive; it is as dead as the people who wrote it and read it, and to whom it meant something, perhaps; with whom it was a fashion, a caprice, a passing taste. A superstitious piety preserves

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[1] Imaginary Interviews, Harper, N. Y., (1910), p. 225.

it, and pretends that it has aesthetic qualities which can delight or edify; but nobody really enjoys it, except as a reflection of the past moods and humors of the race, or a revelation of the author's character; otherwise it is trash, and often very filthy trash, which present trash generally is not."[1]

This passage is quite typical of the manner in which Mr. Howells unfortunately allows his scorn of historical studies to nullify to an almost disastrous extent the effect of fundamentally valid criticisms. He here touches an undeniably weak spot in the academic armor, but he fails to pierce. In this as in other and similar passages he succeeds in conveying the impression that the superstition lies as much in preserving and studying the historical documents as in attributing to them literary qualities which they have not. It may be laid down as a postulate that no progress can be made toward a rationalized aesthetics by the easy expedient of depressing historical studies.

This brings us to a consideration of the fundamental defect of Mr. Howells' criticism, his doctrine of modernism. I can well remember that on first reading his books I was completely mystified to find all the literary virtues and none of the vices attributed to our own time. The words <u>modern</u> and <u>contemporary</u> applied to a literary classic constituted the very highest praise. The matter became clear, of course, on my learning that Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare should be read only as our contemporaries;[2] when it appeared that these were merely Mr. Howells' favorite synonyms for the terms <u>universal</u> and <u>permanent</u>, ordinarily employed in speaking of literary values.

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[1] <u>Criticism and Fiction</u>, p. 146.

[2] <u>My Literary Passions</u>, p. 74.

As I read more, I found it his habitual method to seek the permanent and universal values in a literary work by ignoring its age, and to seek positive and independent merit in a scorn of relative merit. He has simply made an unwarrantable extension of Matthew Arnold's fear of the historical fallacy, and seeks safety in an assumed blindness to historical perspective and in an ignorance of "movements." Thus does he in all seriousness speak of a classic as if written today, or condemn it as being "of its age."

He is in fact skeptical not merely of criticism which views literature as an evolution, but what is stranger still, of that which views an individual masterpiece in its larger aspects. This extreme repudiation of the scholarly ideal, it is only fair to explain, does not so seriously impair his work as the quotation following, which I have selected to show the limitation in its worst effect, might lead one to believe.

"Criticism may torment this sense or that sense out of it, but at the end of the ends the Divine Comedy will stand for the patriotism of mediaeval Italy, as far as its ethics is concerned, and for a profound and lofty ideal of beauty, as far as its aesthetics is concerned. This is vague enough and slight enough, I must confess, but I must confess also that I had not even a conception of so much when I first read the Inferno. I went at it very simply, and my enjoyment of it was that sort which finds its account in the fine passages, the brilliant episodes, the striking pictures. This was the effect with me of all the criticism which I had hitherto read, and I am not sure yet that the criticism which tries to be of a larger scope, and to see things 'whole,' is of any definite effect. As a matter of fact we see nothing whole, neither life nor art. We are

so made, in soul and in sense, that we can deal only with parts, with points, with degrees; and the endeavor to compass any entirety must involve a discomfort and a danger very threatening to our intellectual integrity."[1]

The fantastic length to which Mr. Howells carries his modernism is but another instance of his propensity in theory to simplify the issue with sublime indifference to obvious alternatives. One admires the sincerity, the courage, and the zeal with which he lays hands on pedagogic error. Furthermore, his good-nature is an omnipresent palliative in his work, and his incapacity for the coarser methods of satire habitually saves his gospel from enormity. These cannot, however, blind one to the fact that his sweeping negations are as in the present instance often worse by many degrees than the excesses he assails.

Here again it is interesting to ask if he has been able to maintain in his own criticism such an unpromising ideal. And again it must be said that his practice lags behind his theory. We do find that some literature may be enjoyed as a reflection of the past. Mr. Howells is glad to have acquainted himself with Pope for this very reason. In his words:

"He was the first of the writers of great Anna's time whom I knew, and he made me ready to understand, if he did not make me understand at once, the order of mind and life which he belonged to. Thanks to his pastorals, I could long afterwards enjoy with the double sense requisite for full pleasure in them, such divinely excellent artificialties as Tasso's Aminta and Guarini's Pastor Fido; things which you will thoroughly like only after you are in the joke of

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[1] My Literary Passions, pp. 201-202.

thinking how people once seriously liked them as high examples of poetry."[1]

Of Goldoni's comedies, which Mr. Howells particularly admires: "One ought not to smile at this morality, nowever, without remembering the age, the religion, and the race to which it was addressed: to these some very elementary principles might have seemed novel."[2] One wonders why this tolerance cannot be extended to all literature. One finds that it can to all that Mr. Howells likes, and it is to be said to the credit of his heart again that he likes especially to champion the despised and rejected, yes, even romanticists if they are sufficiently despised. The successive chapters on Mrs. Radcliffe and Scott in Heroines of Fiction, for example, would furnish a puzzle to any reader who was not, as Mr. Howells is wont to say, in the joke of this. The formula "of its age" is an extremely adaptable one, and may be used either to excuse or condemn.

The fact is, Mr. Howells has a number of preferences and prejudices. His judgments suffer through his chivalrous attitude toward women, though in the case of Mrs. Radcliffe it is high time for someone "to justify that poor lady's art." The English reviewers make far too much of his Anglophobia, frequently torturing the most innocent remarks into libel, yet his national bias there is no denying is sometimes obtrusive. What are we to think when, after hearing Scott and Thackeray damned for their sentimentality, we are told that Longfellow's Hyperion is a lovely romance? We first think, of course, of the warm friendship which existed between the author and the critic. But we finally find it made out in dialectic worthy of a schoolman

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[1] My Literary Passions, p. 51.
[2] "Carlo Goldoni" in the Atlantic (1877), 40:608.

that this "lovely romance" is American in inspiration, American be-because some Americans of Longfellow's day, unable to find inspiration in the new world, went abroad to sentimentalize over haunted and legended ruins.[1] Mr. Howells' great complaint against Thackeray is his violation of the objective ideal in narrative, yet he finds Stockton's revelation of his personality "the sweetest effect of his art."[2] He has perhaps been too eager, in his revulsion from a complacent and ultra-conservative criticism, to champion those of his fellow-craftsmen who labor at a disadvantage, whether of racial prejudice, as in the case of Paul Laurence Dunbar, and of Charles W. Chesnutt, or of mere newness to the public, as in the case of nearly every one of the younger realists from Henry James on down, or of persistent unpopularity, as in the case of J. W. DeForest. This loyalty has been in the main as sincere and praiseworthy as it has been effective, but it has not held the new and the living to quite the standard of the dead or the firmly established. Too much cause is given for the misunderstanding that prompted a recent critic to exclaim: "To ask why Eden Phillpotts is a great novelist, and Thackeray, Dickens, and Meredith are not is not a question of criticism. It is a conundrum."

All of these specific shortcomings, however, really weigh very little in the balance against the service which has been rendered by the simple but still unpopular expedient of telling the truth about the masters of the past. We well know that the veriest tyro today would not commit some of the blunders common in the masters of

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[1]"Henry Wadsworth Longfellow," in the North American Review (1867), 104:535.

[2]"Mr. Stockton and All His Works," in the Book Buyer (1900), 20:20.

yesterday. This is all Mr. Howells means at heart, and in this may be read the answer to the conundrum just proposed. This positive side of the case, to which I now gladly turn, is put by Professor Brander Matthews as follows:

> "However great Scott was, and Dickens, and Thackeray, they were none of them perfect artists; they were great in spite of gross derelictions from the highest standard. This is what Mr. Howells has tried to make plain even to careless readers; and it is for making this plain that careless readers are not willing to forgive him. Nothing is more certain to arrest progress than a smug satisfaction with the past--unless it is a slavish copying of the inferior models bequeathed to us by our more primitive predecessors. Nothing is more helpful than a clear understanding of the merits and of the demerits of the early masters. The merits are obvious enough, but the demerits need to be discovered and declared before they can serve as warnings. It is not a paradox but a truism that the art of fiction is a finer art today than it was when Thackeray was writing--just as it was a finer art in Thackeray's time than it was when Cervantes was writing. As Mr. Howells puts it pithily, it was the misfortune of Balzac that he 'lived too soon to profit by Balzac;' and so Cervantes had lived too soon to profit by Cervantes. Those who refuse blindly to see any blemishes in the art of Balzac or of Cervantes, those who persist in upholding Scott and Dickens and Thackeray as impeccable artists, need to be reminded that ancestor-worship is no longer esteemed the highest form of religion."[1]

Mr. Howells contribution to criticism has indeed been out of all proportion to the merits of his theory of criticism. He stands very much in relation to this problem as the schoolboy to his sum when he arrives at the right answer by a wrong method of working. The next matter which we have to consider will make clear, I think, the reason. For no error could be greater than to suppose that, historical criticism or the study of literature in its evolutionary aspect having been cast overboard, he has no other than a subjective criterion left. Although his soul has its wonderful adventure among masterpieces, he is in no sense to be ranged with the impressionistic

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[1] "Mr. Howells as a Critic," in the Forum (1902), 32:637.

critics. His theory of the function and ideals of literature furnishes him with a very real standard of judgment. This is simply conformity to life and its reality. And his chief value to modern literature is that he has made it reflect life more accurately and acknowledge the reflection of life without distortion and with moral intent as its aim and ideal.

III. HIS IDEALS OF LITERATURE

Mr. Howells' significant contribution to criticism lies in the direction neglected if not ignored by his theory of criticism. He habitually construes the critical process as an occupation concerned with books, whereas his practice is habitually concerned with the life recorded in books. The essential fact about modern art is its fusion of the ideals of literature, of architecture, or of painting, with the ideals of life. The novel of today aspires to be not only an aesthetic document, not merely an ethic document in a didactic sense, but a revelation in terms of the highest art of the moral facts of our life. It is in the dissemination of this idea that Mr. Howells has rendered his chief service, and in literary theory he has been its most unequivocal and certainly its most voluminous American exponent.

To carry the matter at once to its simplest terms, literature and the cognate arts are to be identified in aim with all the other great civilizing forces, like science, which have raised the human family from a condition of savagery to a comparatively rich and happy existence. The great and sole function of scientific writing must be recognized as the aim of all serious artistic writing--to make the truth prevail. "Men are more alike than unlike one another;" says Mr. Howells, "let us make them know one another better, that

they may be all humbled and strengthened with a sense of their fraternity. Neither art, nor letters, nor sciences, except as they somehow, clearly or obscurely, tend to make the race better and kinder, are to be regarded as serious interests; they are all lower than the lowest crafts that feed and house and clothe, for except they do this office they are idle; and they cannot do this except from and through the truth."[1]

Such a conception of the function of literature happily presents little novelty today, although it has failed to penetrate certain circles, nor was it by any means original during the late eighties when Mr. Howells was issuing his pronunciamentos from the Editor's Study. It had in its contemporary implications its genesis in the positivistic and scientific furnace through which earlier in the century the rich ore of romanticism had to pass. It attained in the Zolaism of the seventies its extreme of formal exposition, the identification of the literary aim and method with the scientific. Then came its diffusion and modification. The correction of unfortunate tendencies in the roman naturaliste came immediately under the renaissance of the roman psychologique. (In 1886, the year of Mr. Howells' editorial accession appeared Bourget's Crime d'Amour.) But the winds of doctrine, which blew mostly from France, left Mr. Howells unmoved.[2] He has repeatedly been called a doctrinaire, but the basic principles of his doctrine are those of common sense, and for terminology he cares not a strsw--les than one could wish, for no one has more flagrantly abused the terms "realistic" and "romantic." Since France was the storm centre of realistic theory and practice, the paucity of

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[1] Criticism and Fiction(1901), p. 188.

[2] His literary novel The World of Chance (1893) includes an incidental treatment of the opposing schools just mentioned.

French influence in his case, a paucity inadequately explained by his horror of l'esprit gallois, is appalling. I have already mentioned the perceptible chill in his attitude toward the father of realists, Balzac, and the same holds true in even greater measure for the children of Balzac's nationality. Of course, thereis involved no difficulty in explaining the presence of similar ideas in Mr. Howells. The atmosphere of the whole literary world was saturate with them; they were no man's property; and their genesis in the case of any man presents a problem of that man's individual temperament.

Mr. Howells' personal preferences led him to describe a large circle about France, including Russia, Italy, Spain, England, and Norway. He admires Zola with reservations, but his unreserved enthusiasm is kindled when he speaks of Giovanni Verga, that finest flower of the Zolaism that called to life the Sicilian and Neopolitan naturalism. Björnson among the Scandinavians is most congenial to him, Ibsen remaining a subsidiary influence, of less import compared to Björnson, I am tempted to say, than among English realists, Anthony Trollope compared to Jane Austen. To "the Divine Jane," George Eliot may play second, but no such second as Turgeniev plays to Tolstoi among the Russians. But among all these and the others, for I give only a representative list, his affinity with Jane Austen is the only one that could have been predicted so unerringly as that with his Spanish counterpart in genial, personal, poetic, sincerely moralized realism--Palacio Valdés. All of Mr. Howells' great literary admirations are characterized by a warmth which is akin to personal affection, and his theoretic convictions have been arrived at empirically by a literally devoted study of the authors he admires.

As to the influence of continental literary theory aside

from practice, it would be easy to exaggerate the importance of Tolstoi. One finds in Mr. Howells the application to American conditions of principles expounded in Tolstoi's ethical and religious books, and this by the way of literary criticism.[1] There is inevitable agreement in certain fundamentals of aesthetic doctrine, but assuredly Mr. Howells has not gone the lengths of What is Art? The indebtedness here is rather to the Spanish critics, Emilia Pardo-Bazán and especially Valdés. It is from the latter that he draws the most grateful support for his conception of the literary office voiced at the opening of the present chapter.

Literature, together with painting, sculpture, and music, he explains from Valdés, ennobles through the spirit of beauty to which the human heart is ever responsive. The beautiful effect, it "receives from the true meaning of things; it does not matter what the things are, and it is the function of the artist who feels this effect to impart it to others." "I may add," he continues, "that there is no joy in art except this perception of the meaning of things and its communication; when you have felt it, and portrayed it in a poem, a symphony, a novel, a statue, a picture, an edifice, you have fulfilled the purpose for which you were born an artist."[2]

Such are the rudiments of a realistic theory, essentially democratic in its implications, so broad in its applications that it might well be called simply the gospel of modernism in art. The perception of the meaning of things and its communication has in fact supplanted in the minds of our best artists an older abstract ideal

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[1] E. G., "Robert Herrick" in the North American Review (1909), 189:814.

[2] Criticism and Fiction, p. 62.

of Beauty. And they have found a meaning beautiful because true in all things once regarded as ignoble. It is still far from platitude, however, to insist that it positively "does not matter what the things are." That axiom underlies the whole of Mr. Howells' doctrine, and constitutes the philosophic justification of his tireless endeavor to show poor real life its foolish face.[1]

"The man of our time," says Valdés, "wishes to know everything and enjoy everything: he turns the objective of a powerful equitorial towards the heavenly spaces where gravitate the infinitude of the stars, just as he applies the microscope to the infinitude of the smallest insects; for their laws are identical. His experience, united with intuition, has convinced him that in nature there is neither great nor small; all is equal. All is equally grand, all is equally just, all is equally beautiful, because all is equally divine." "Things that appear ugliest in reality to the spectator who is not an artist," he continues, "are transformed into beauty and poetry when the spirit of the artist possesses itself of them. We all take part every day in a thousand domestic scenes, every day we see a thousand pictures in life, that do not make any impression upon us, or if they make any it is one of repugnance; but let the novelist come, and without betraying the truth, but painting them as they appear to his vision, he produces a most interesting work, whose perusal enchants us. That which in life left us indifferent, or repelled us, in art delights us. Why? Simply because the artist has made us see the idea that resides in it. Let not the novelists, then, endeavor to add anything to reality, to turn it and twist it, to restrict it. Since nature has endowed them with this precious gift of discovering

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[1] Vide. Their Wedding Journey (1871), (ed. 1899), p. 67.

ideas in things, their work will be beautiful if they paint these as they appear. But if the reality does not impress them, in vain will they strive to make their work impress others."[1]

Nevertheless, there still lingers in our literature an observable aristocratic spirit which is the negation of this, which instructs the author not to choose types and subjects unworthy of the dignity of literary treatment. Objection to Mr. Howells' endeavor to give America a novel of manners, which was common enough twenty years or more ago and which now occasionally crops out in the English weeklies, has been curiously and thoroughly made as late as 1903 in the columns of the Atlantic Monthly.

"The truth is," says Harriet Waters Preston, reviewing The Kentons, "that the novel of manners demands, first of all, manners to

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[1] "El hombre de esta época quiere saberlo todo y gozarlo todo; lo mismo dirige el objectivo de una poderosa escuatorial á los espacios celestes donde gravita el infinito de los astros, como aplica el microscopio al infinito de los pequeños, cuyas leyes son idénticas. Su experiencia, unida á la intuicion, le ha convencido de que en la Naturaleza no hay grande ni pequeño: todo es igual, todo es igualmente grande, todo es igualmente juso, todo es igualmente bello; porque todo es igualmente divino."

"Y á este proposito hago observar que las cosas que parecen más feas en la realidad á los ojos del espectador que no es artista, se transforman en hermosas y poéticas cuando el espiritu de uno de éstos se apodera de ellas. Todos los días asistimos con indiferencia à mil escenas domésticas; todos los días vemos mil cuadros en la vida que no nos causan impresión alguna, y si nos la causan, es de repugnancia; pero llega el novelista, y sin faltar á la verdad, pintándolas tal como aparecen á su vista, produce una obra interesantísima, cuya lectura nos encanta. Lo que en la vida nos dejaba indiferentes ó nos repubnaba, nos seduce en el Arte. ¿Por que? Sólo porque el artisto nos hace ver la idea qui reside en ellas. No se esfuercen, pues, los novelistas en añadir nada á la realidad, ni en retorcerla, ni aun en limarla. Como la Naturaleza les haya dotado de esa preciosa facultad de descubrir en los fenómenos la idea, pintando éstos tal cual aparecen, serán bellos. Mas si la realidad no les impresiona, en vano lucharán por que sus obras impresiona á los demás."--- La Hermana San Sulpicio. Tome 1. Prologo. (Madrid, Hernández, 1889), pp. XV., XLII. Translation from Criticism and Fiction, pp. 61, 71.

be delineated. But manners, in the widest sense, imply homogeneous and stable conditions; a certain social creed and hierarchy accepted without question and almost without thought, together with a tyrannous tradition antedating but always coexisting with long codified laws of conduct; and manners in this general sense, we have none in America."[1]

As a definition to be made the basis of a useful technical distinction, such a limitation of the term manners is perhaps to be recommended, but that such definition is not the critic's purpose is made evident by her use of the phrases "in the widest sense" and "in this general sense." To the novelist like Mr. Howells, who has made instability of social code his field for the delineation of manners, there is no choice but to regard the tyranny of tradition as the dictator of manners in the narrowest sense. Not to do so is to exclude the Kentons from the category of proper types, and our critic says in so many words that "we owe Mr. Howells a grudge" for having made us know them. She may desire with Señor Valdés to view the celestial spaces and the infinitude of the stars, but she radically objects to the having the insects thrust within the field of vision. The Kentons, the tender solicitude of this aging pair for one another and for their foolish children, their pathetic fatuity, their lamentable ignorance of the ways of the world beyond the Alleghanies, their beautiful and gradual growth into mutual dependence--how familiar and touching much of it all is! Yet we are bidden to regard it as a deformity on the face of civilization.

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[1] "The Latest Novels of Howells and James."in The Atlantic (1903), 91:71-9.

"Types they may be, but normal and complete human beings they are not. They are the scum and spawn of a yeasty deep,--the monstrous offspring of barbarous and illicit social relations. They are necessarily short-lived, and, it is to be hoped, sterile; and if let alone would probably perish with the transitory conditions that gave them birth. To make of their deformities a dime side show at our noisy National Fair is, to say the least of it, not nice. To pursue them intently--to approach their sad case with paraphernalia of literary preparation--is like riding in pink, and with winding of horns, to a hunt of cockroaches!"[1]

Thus Brahmanism from time to time gets in its word, but our literature has continued to develop a positive and inclusive view of civilization such as the conception of Howells and Valdés provides for. The psychologic and sociologic spirit has made all humanity its province and has found the social relations evolved from new conditions far from "barbarous and illicit." As a matter of fact, it has crossed the frontiers of barbarism in pursuit of strange atavisms, but these have enticed those modern souls who, as in the cases of Kipling and Conrad, include in their composition a perceptible romantic strain. What is common to the men of our epoch is an illimitable expansion of interest, an outward-facing attitude which admits no imagining that their loyalty to a group, a tradition, or an ideal, can be fostered to good issue by ignoring the claims of the human to sympathetic understanding wherever manifest and in whatever lowly condition. The choicest spirits of our age are trying to make men better known to one another by and through the truth. In this endeavor

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[1] "The Latest Novels of Howells and James." in The Atlantic (1903), 91:77-9.

it is Mr. Howells' distinction to have chosen his field at out own door-steps, and to have made the despised and rejected American tradition of social equality his ideal.

For Mr. Howells, democracy has become identified with the principles of the Declaration of Independence, humanitarianism with the simple precepts taught by Christ during his mission on earth. The spirit of democracy as it informs the larger literary body of which he is a part and to which his criticism gives sanction, it would be hazardous to define more restrictedly than as an enlightened humanitarian impulse which aims to liberate men from the curse of narrowness and selfishness. This end is subserved in art solely by the depiction of human life in its every aspect with the utmost fidelity to fact. It admits no limitation of subject matter, but asserts as an axiom the essential equality of all experience. The only legitimate question for the artist or his critic is that concerned with the value of the artistic product into which the experience has been transmuted. It is equally irreconcilable with polemic distortion and the distortion of art which professes to be unmoral. It reconciles the conflicting claims of didacticism and l'art pour l'art by dismissing both.

It goes without saying that realism, having long since repudiated the simple poetic justice of the sentimental novelists, scorns to allow the truth to be in the least tampered with by way of making a sermon. It is not,however,disposed to ignore indebtedness to the rare talents of an earlier day who succeeded under the heavy handicap imposed by moral teaching. Mr. Howells is glad to head the list of modern heroines with Clarissa Harlowe, and he pleads eloquently for a reversal of the sentence which relegates Maria Edgeworth "to the sad

society of the mere sermoners."[1]

"Fiction had not yet conceived of the supreme ethics which consist in portraying life truly and letting the lesson take care of itself. After a hundred years this conception is not yet very clear to many novelists, or, what is worse, to their critics; and the novel, to save itself alive from the contempt and abhorrence in which the most of good people once held it, had to be good in the fashion of the sermon rather than in the fashion of the drama. It felt its way slowly and painfully by heavy sloughs of didacticism and through dreary tracts of moral sentiment to the standing it now has, and we ought to look back at its flounderings, not with wonder that it floundered so long, but that it ever arrived. In fact, it did not flounder so very long, and it arrived at what is still almost an ideal perfection in the art of Jane Austen."[1]

Mr. Howells is not always content to assuage his impatience of anything but literal truth by the formula "of its age." When as a boy he came under Lowell's influence and obediently tried to like everthing the master liked, he fell instantly in love with Chaucer, but try as he would he could find no place for Spenser in his heart. He consigns the abstract and the typical to the melodrama and extravaganza of the theatre and like plays. The apologue of high morality he finds as worthless as ever Tolstoi found the allegorizing of the decadents, though not so worthy of condemnation. The Tolstoi of the parables he simply regrets as a loss to art.

It should be borne in mind that this theory in liberating literature from the bondage of didacticism and flouting the polemic

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[1] Heroines of Fiction. (1901), v.1. p. 26.

wherever found, does so precisely for the purpose of establishing its instructional office.

"The art which in the meantime disdains the office of teacher is one of the last refuges of the aristocratic spirit, which is disappearing from politics and society, and is now seeking to shelter itself in aesthetics.....Democracy in literature is the reverse of all this. It wishes to know and to tell the truth, confident that consolation and delight are there; it does not care to paint the marvellous and impossible for the vulgar many, or to sentimentalize and falsify the actual for the vulgar few."[1]

So far as the time-worn formula of l'art pour l'art is a protest against the subversion of beauty by the moral intent, its claim has been granted; so far as it would subvert the moral sense in the pursuit of beauty it is to be answered by a new interpretation of the old truism: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." To Mr. Howells the question has no meaning. Good art, in short, is good morality. He is willing enough to concede the possibility of an unmoral aim, that an artist may create solely with an eye for beauty, but that beauty can ever be the sole effect of his creation, is inconceivable.

"Morality penetrates all things, it is the soul of all things. Beauty may clothe it on, whether it is false morality and an evil soul, or whether it is true and a good soul. In the one case the beauty will corrupt, and in the other it will edify, and in either case it will infallibly and inevitably have an ethical effect, now light, now grave, according as the thing is light or grave."[2]

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[1] Criticism and Fiction, p. 187.

[2] Ibid., p.88.

It is quite possible to quarrel with Mr. Howells' terminology, but his meaning is clear enough, and, to my mind, unexceptionable. Not so, however, his notions of the beauty which corrupts; these turn out to be neither clear nor unexceptionable. Clear they may be as indices to individual taste and temper, but they do not consist with the rudimentary principles thus far sketched. It now appears that the truth may be corrupting. There is no inconsistency in a realist's objecting to books which portray bestiality "under a glamour of something spiritual, and beautiful, and sublime."[1] The manner of treatment is sufficient to remove such works from the realistic category. Neither as a general proposition could it be denied that many a classic author has his lapses in this regard. Yet this is a matter in which it is all too easy to make distorted judgments, to postulate wickedness on the basis of mere subject matter. Mr. Howells has gone so far as to call for expurgated editions of the classics.

"I hope the time will come when the beast-man will be so far subdued and tamed in us that the memory of him in literature shall be left to perish.....that the pedant pride which now perpetuates it as an essential part of those poets shall no longer have its way. At the end of the ends such things do defile, they do corrupt. We may palliate them or excuse them for this reason or that, but that is the truth, and I do not see why they should not be dropped from literature, as they were long ago dropped from the talk of decent people."[2]

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[1] "Tengo por mucho más inmorales otros libros que, con apariencias de espiritualidad de algo bello y sublime propio del hombre distinguido, ofrecen en realidad los vicios que nos acercan precisamente á la bestia."---La Hermana San Sulpicio, Tome 1, p. XXXI, Translation from Criticism and Fiction, p. 61.

[2] My Literary Passions, p. 54.
cf. My Literary Passions pp. 109-113 (Chaucer).

I have already commented upon Mr. Howells' extreme readiness to divorce the historic interest from the aesthetic. This question, however, is one that does not need to be debated on grounds of scholarship. It is simply a matter of justice to the author and his reader. I have never had the misfortune to see a mangled Chaucer, but I have seen Burns purified by utterly ruining the rime and obscuring the reason, an insult to the genius of the poet and to the intelligence of all who would know him. We have the spectacle, droll to say the least, of Swinburne inviting us to admire the beauties of a poem by Villon part of which the idolater of Mademoiselle de Maupin found too vile to print even in its antique French. No man can be trusted to exercise anything but the wildest vagary in this procedure of expurgation, for it is in essence unnatural and unaesthetic. To remove the parts from what was in its inception and execution an organic whole requires a false attitude and a suspension of appreciation. It s worst effect is in the suppression of evidence necessary for correct judgment, suppression by a meddler of evidence which the author has freely furnished. This must be an abomination before all mature and candid souls. As for the young, I would not have them read authors apt to prove dangerous on too close acquaintanceship, or at least I would not have them read fragments of a work which would defile and corrupt as a whole. Moreover, one does not live very long in this wicked world without encountering enough bestiality to render innocuous the works of the great literary geniuses.

Having agreed that there is no comfort in ignorance, and having received with vast acclaim the declaration that the man of today should know everything, I see no consistency in being asked to live by the talk of "decent people" alone. The Wife of Bath is on

her pilgrimage today, and to spurn her acquaintance is clearly to invite sclerosis of the sympathies. But this would not be worth dilating upon if Mr. Howells' squeamishness ended with his disgust at the license of bygone centuries. He brings it into the very holy of holies of modernism. He is happy to find that by virtue of what he congratulates us upon as our Anglo-Saxon tradition or convention of decency, which denies our writers freedom of subject and treatment, we are forbidden to follow in the footsteps of the great French and Russian masters. "You cannot deal with Tolstoi's and Flaubert's subjects in the absolute artistic freedom of Tolstoi and Flaubert;" he admonishes our writers, "since De Foe, that is unknown among us; but if you deal with them in the manner of George Eliot, of Thackeray, of Dickens, of society, you may deal with them even in the magazines."[1] No doubt the methods of George Eliot, of Thackeray, or of Dickens, would be found within the pale of decency today. But after Mr. Howells has told us so often of the infinite superiority of those of Tolstoi, it seems cruel to rejoice over the fact that we cannot follow his example. No one of the great English trio fully satisfied him; George Eliot is the only one who can be said to have satisfied him at all; he saw the true light dawn over the steppes of Russia; he found the last word said in Turgeniev and Tolstoi; and yet he is glad that darkness still hangs over our land; he finds it right and fitting that the Anglo-Saxon mouth should be stopped. Why? One would fain let the question pass, but the truth must out: in our country we write for young ladies.[2] Is not that a pretty box in which to

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[1] Criticism and Fiction, p. 161.

[2] A persistent idea in Mr. Howell's writing. Vide, e.g., Ibid., p. 149.

shut our budding Tolstoi? Grown-up Americans may enjoy their Turgeniev and Tolstoi, may be saddened by their Flaubert and Zola, because the books can be locked up; but let our writers continue to write realism for young ladies.

Happily, our writers have not continued to do so, and the enormity of the demand is made evident by the fact that the most radical exception to Mr. Howells' exaltation of Victorian prudery, even while more worthy qualities of the great Victorians leave him cold and unresponsive, has been taken by his favorite pupils, so to speak, those who stand most nearly in the relation of discipleship, and whose vitality in our literature he has most continuously been predicting and acknowledging. His school, of course, denies being a school as such, but his long leadership in precept and example, coupled with his powerful editorial connections, has made him a schoolmaster in a very real sense. Hamlin Garland in an unequivocal espousal of his doctrine remarked:

> As the art which Mr. Howells represents declines to be held accountable to any age, or land, or individual, so it discourages discipleship. It says to the young writer: 'Look to nature and to actuality for your model--not to any book, or man, or number of men. Be true to yourself. Write of that of which you know the most,and follow faithfully the changes in your feeling. Put yourself down before common realities, common hopes, common men, till their pathos and mystery, and significance flood you like a sea, and when the life that is all about you is so rich with drama and poetry, and the vista of human thought and passion so infinite that you are in despair of ever expressing a thousandth part of what you feel, then all idea of discipleship will be at an end. Your whole aim will be to be true to yourself and your infinite teacher, nature, and you will no longer strive to delineate beauty, but truth, and at last truth will be beauty."[1]

Mr. Howells has followed the work of this free and enlightened disci-

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[1] "Mr. Howells's Latest Novels" in the New England Magazine (1890) 2:243 n.s.

ple with the highest interest and approbation. Yet he cannot enjoy frankness in facing facts when the facts happen to be the facts about sexual relations. Of Garland's handling of erotic themes, he says:

".....It puts the gross passions, the propensities to shame, rather than flatters or entices them; but it doesn't recognize the beast in the man's desire of the woman, the satyr leer which is the complement of the lover's worship. In Rose of Dutcher's Coolly, in Hesper, in Money Magic, measurably in them all, you find the refusal, when it comes to the fact, to ignore what cannot be denied. I am old-fashioned, and I have moments when I could wish that the author had not been of such unsparing conscience. That is all, and with this wish noted I can give myself to the entire pleasure which the purity and wholesomeness of his fiction offers me."[1]

Mr. Howells difficulties with the work of his favorite, Mr. Robert Herrick, too, are distressing, but have effective counterbalance in the positive qualities to which he accords a critical analysis more illuminating than he has given those of any other contemporary novelist. His comment, by no means unjust, that Mr. Herrick "sees the social conditions, as regards the wilfulness and waywardness of women, rather redder than they are, or say yellower, for there is a strain of vulgarity in their abberations which is very suggestive of a kind of modern journalism,"[2] is interesting because it suggests a rather strained attempt which he has made from time to time to reconcile his weakness with the demands of realism. The argument is, in brief, that conditions are more fortunate here than abroad, and that, consequently

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[1] "Mr. Garland's Books" in the North American Review 196:523.

[2] "Robert Herrick" in the North American Review (1909) 189:812.

the novelist who portrays our conditions does wrong to infuse unwholesome conceptions of love.[1] It is true, of course, that our novelists are exposed to danger of deviating from accuracy to American fact when too slavish in their adoption of European method; but it is equally true that Mr. Howells stands in the contrary danger of undue emphasis upon differences. The facts behind a journalism which may well be called "yellow," prove, nevertheless, that the eternal triangle is a common phenomenon under the American condition, whether or not it is more common under the European. Mr. Howells' argument may do something toward exonerating the "young lady audience," but all too little, I fear; and meanwhile it is wholesome and significant that practically all of his followers, even to the gentle Boyesen, have at one time or another risen in revolt against those mythical young ladies. I say "mythical" because one of the few points on which I agree with George Moore is that not the young ladies but the librarians are the champions of aenemic fiction.

That Mr. Howells' penchant for respectability has limited his sympathies in certain directions is borne out by biographical fact. His description of Pfaff's celebrated beer-cellar on Broadway, which he visited as a young man fresh from the ultra-refinement of the Bostonian literary circle, is penned in a manner somewhat foreign to his gentle nature. Those who took offence at it, however, did not hold themselves strictly to the letter of justice, since Mr. Howells' chief objection to Pfaff's was that it was a sham Bohemia, though it is perfectly evident that he would have been no more at home in the Bohemia of Paul Verlaine. William Winter, in his Memories of Authors took issue with Mr. Howells, and Winter's correction called forth

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[1] A. Schade van Westrum. "Mr. Howells on Love and Literature," in Lamp (1904), 28:26.

at least one editorial of general pertinence to the subject, "The Romanticism of Prudery" by Mr. Colby of The Bookman. Mr. Colby, after remarking that extreme niceness leads readers to "plunge into rebellious extremes of great coarseness, swearing, perhaps, or eating with their knives," goes on to comment upon a detail from The Pursuit of the Piano.

"Thus the hero of one of his short stories printed a few years ago, observes from his window a piano-case having on it the name and address of a young woman. After long and very minute reflection he concludes that the young woman may have been a little girl whom he used to see years before running barefooted on her father's lawn. The fancied identification of this young woman, now no doubt quite grown-up, with the child whose active brown legs he distinctly remembers, brings the hot blushes to that hero's cheeks. It is the romanticism of prudery--an extreme instance, perhaps, but illustrating Mr. Howells's spinster-like intemperance in matters of propriety. The romancers idealize the manly virtues of their heroes; he idealizes the niceness of his. It is no harder to slay a giant than to blush in solitude at the thought of brown legs. There are, of course, deeds of propriety no less incredible than deeds of blood, and the 'refinement' of Mr. Howells's heroes often seems as unfamiliar to this earth as the beauty and bravery of Sir Walter's."[1]

I am not one to quarrel with Mr. Howells' choice so far as regards his own practice. He has chosen the harder task in confining his treatment of love to an intensive study of secondary sexual characteristics, just as he took the immeasurably more difficult portion in mapping out his general field. The absence of passion from his

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[1] The Bookman (1908), 28:124-6.

books is, however, a defect so far as concerns a completely realistic portrayal of life; and, moreover, it is the same sort of defect as he deplores in the case of novelists engrossed with the animal side of man's nature. It is to be said vastly to his favor that his excess is in the nature of an artistic mission, and that he has rendered an inestimable service and one that no other has appeared so competent to render to American realism.

IV. HIS LITERARY METHOD

The aim of the Howells-Valdés type of realism, to delight and ennoble the soul by revealing the truth, the idea that resides in things, and this through the ever-living sense of beauty, is thus couched in terms too generous for monopoly by the literature of any one time or place. Such was the aim of romanticism at its best, and so far as romanticism was faithful to its highest calling, we are to reverence it. It struggled, says Mr. Howells, "to overthrow the classic tradition.....to seek poetry in the common experiences of men and to find beauty in any theme; to be utterly free, untrammeled, and abundant; to be in literature what the Gothic is in architecture. It perished because it came to look for beauty only, and all that was good in it became merged in realism, which looks for truth."[1] Thus classicism perished (it is in construing this word, I fear, that I should quarrel with Mr. Howells) because it could not find truth and beauty in life as it is, but had to have it conventionalized, and recast in heroic mold. Then romanticism, overthrowing convention, discovered the divine in the lowest orders of men. But having possessed itself of beauty, it could not be content to leave that beauty unadorned; it must magnify, suppress, sentimentalize, idealize. So realism has succeeded to the high office of making ideas known among

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[1] Modern Italian Poets, p. 135.

men, instructing while it enchants, by an artistic revelation of the truth as it resides in all things great and trivial. "Romanticism then sought, as realism seeks now, to widen the bounds of sympathy, to level every barrier against aesthetic freedom, to escape from the paralysis of tradition. It exhausted itself in this impulse; and it remained for realism to assert that fidelity to experience and probability of motive are essential conditions of a great imaginative literature. It is not a new theory, but it has never before universally characterized literary endeavor. When realism becomes false to itself, when it heaps up facts merely, and maps life instead of picturing it, realism will perish too."[1]

Realism, then, first endeavors to link art beyond all severance with the actual facts of life; it holds the raison d'être of fiction to be the exact depiction of human conduct and motive. Reasonable as this seems, your true romanticist will shy at any such words as actual or exact. "And as the root of the whole matter," bids Robert Louis Stevenson, "let him bear in mind that his novel is not a transcript of life, to be judged by its exactitude; but a simplification of some side or point of life, to stand or fall by its significant simplicity."[2]

Stevenson's estimate of our novelist, later appended to "A Humble Remonstrance," is apposite here. His conception of the man as a theory-ridden romanticist is still a living one, Mr. Fred Lewis Pattee having recently advanced it in his unique and valuable History

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[1] Criticism and Fiction. p. 15.

[2] "A Humble Remonstrance" in Memories and Portraits (1887), originally in Longman's Magazine, Dec., 1884. Works (1909), v. 13, p. 357.

of American Literature Since 1870, (1915). The notion is invariably accompanied by a feeling that realism is a process of somehow abstracting the briskness and joy from life. The phrase "glow of romance" is common to all who harbor the idea. Of course, it must be remembered that we labour with a hopeless terminology. The word "romantic" is the vaguest in the critical lexicon, but so firmly ensconced that even the historian defines it at his peril. Professor Beers is still defending himself for having tried to make it mean something in a historical sense. In the department of fictional criticism, the standard hand-books, such as Professor Bliss Perry's Study of Prose Fiction and Mr. Clayton Hamilton's Materials and Methods of Fiction, with the best intentions in the world, have done much to augment the confusion. Mr. Hamilton's chapter on realism and romance was intended to show the uselessness of Professor Perry's, and has the sole merit of having accomplished that purpose with éclat. Professor Brander Matthews some years ago proposed relieving our long-suffering word by making derivative terms share some of its meanings. His discerning effort has been ineffectual, and I am persuaded that the easier course would be the substitution of altogether new and precise expressions.

Now for Stevenson:

> "Since the above was written another novelist has entered repeatedly the lists of theory: one well worthy of mention, Mr. W. D. Howells; and none ever couched a lance with narrower convictions. His own work and those of his pupils and masters singly occupy his mind; he is the bondslave, the zealot of his school; he dreams of an advance in art like what there is in science; he thinks of past things as radically dead; he thinks a form can be outlived; a strange immersion in his own history; a strange forgetfulness of the history of the race! Meanwhile, by a glance at his own works (could he see them with the eager eyes of his readers) much of this illusion would be dispelled. For while he holds all the poor little orthodoxies of the day--no poorer and no smaller than those of yesterday or

> tomorrow, poor and small, indeed, only so far as they are exclusive--the living quality of much that he has done is of a contrary, I had almost said of a heretical, complexion. A man, as I read him, of an originally strong romantic bent--a certain glow of romance still resides in many of his books, and lends them their distinction. As by accident he runs out and revels in the exceptional; and it is then, as often as not, that his reader rejoices--justly, as I contend. For in all this excessive eagerness to be centrally human, is there not one central human thing that Mr. Howells is too often tempted to neglect: I mean himself? A poet, a finished artist, a man in love with the appearances of life, a cunning reader of the mind, he has other passions and aspirations than those he loves to draw. And why should he suppress himself and do such reverence to the Lemuel Barkers? The obvious is not of necessity the normal; fashion rules and deforms; the majority fall tamely into the contemporary shape, and thus attain, in the eyes of the true observer, only a higher power of insignificance; and the danger is lest, in seeking to draw the normal, a man should draw the null, and write the novel of society instead of the romance of man."[1]

The romancer wishes his characters simplified and unified. From the tangled play of contradictory motives, he plucks out a ruling passion. His story is a train, a procession, of direct causes and effects, many of them dependent upon coincident and accident. The right thing to keep the story moving is sure to happen, whether the chances of its happening in life are favorable or not. If too obviously not, the author adds events or alters with the purpose of making the tale believable. In fine, he creates a world of his own, which he manipulates as he chooses, claiming for it, if he be a writer at all worthy of consideration, truth to the essentials of the world in which we live, but scorning our world's mere facts. They are null. He perhaps holds it the duty of art to <u>explain</u> life by reconstructing it in a more intelligible medium, and, in a far too intelligible manner. Stevenson again:

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[1]"A Humble Remonstrance," in <u>Memories and Portraits</u> (1887), originally in Longman's Magazine, Dec., 1884. Works, (1909), v. 13, p. 357.

"For the welter of impressions, all forcible but discreet, which life presents, it substitutes a certain artificial series of impressions, all indeed most feebly represented, but all aiming at the same effect, all eloquent of the same idea, all chiming together like consonant notes in music or like the graduated tints in a good picture. From all its chapters, from all its pages, from all its sentences, the well-written novel echoes and re-echoes its one creative and controlling thought; to this must every incident and character contribute; the style must have been pitched in unison with this; and if there is anywhere a word that looks another way, the book would be stronger, clearer, and (I had almost said) fuller without it."[1]

Now, we must not accuse Mr. Howells, when he sounds the paean of the commonplace and the null, of denying the essential principle of selection in art. Realism requires the nicest selection, but it selects not to eliminate but to preserve the "welter of impressions.....which life presents." The very freshness and charm of life, I had almost said its glow, as well as the infinite depths of its sadness, are to be felt with poignancy as the impression approaches actuality, as the artist has caught and transfixed upon his page something of life's recognizable complexity, its confusion, its chaos, if you like, its kaleidoscopic succession of sights, and its inextricable tangling of motives. The manipulation, with whatever skill it be accomplished, of a "certain artificial series of impressions....all eloquent of the same idea," robs the reader of his most precious privilege, to observe life in the actual living through the medium of the printed page. This is after all what remains after decades of novel-reading. Stevenson, the eternal boy, as several per-

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[1] "A Humble Remonstrance." p. 349.

sons call him, was really unusual in this regard. Not so the shabby counterfeiters who continue to ply his formulae. Mr. Howells, I am convinced, might read Stevenson with edification, which he has not done, seemingly through a misapprehension that the Scot wrote only stories about pirates and the like.

Accidents happen in the realistic novel, too, just as they happen in the everyday world; but they are apt to be not of the "moving" variety. Furthermore, they are too often not set right, and the reader accustomed to romantic jugglery cries from his cozy ingle nook: "Pessimist! Life is not like that !" There is no arguing with a reader who wants things to happen in the fashion of a play,not in the fashion of this sad world of ours. You can only tell him, and that is probably what his loosely styled pessimistic novel has tried todo. Nor is there any blaming him, for he has simply yet to outgrow the tastes of his boyhood. He wishes to find in modern literature a world comparable to that in which moved the Indians, athletes, and heroes of chivalry who once delighted him. He wishes "stories," not life; and the craving for stories is a natural part of life.[1] Not all members of civilized communities, Mr. Howells reminds us, are civilized even in their habits; much less should we expect to find them sophisticated in their tastes. Nay, we all have our moods of barbarism, which may be harmless, but are not "high moods or fortunate moments," when we relish trapeze performances, prestidigitation, negro minstrelsy, and romantic fiction. It is usually after we have consumed a large quantity of romances that the taste for conjuring becomes a matter of occasional mood with us, and we take our joy, not in the skilful construction of an imitation of life, but in a mirror held up

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[1] A part which Mr. Howells is fond of depicting, especially in the adolescent, e.g., Boyne Kenton in The Kentons.

to Nature herself.

So the ideal of the artist is to hold the mirror up to nature, not to make a model illustrating nature, either in hope of eliminating the unessential and confusing, and thus giving truer ideas, or in the childish desire to construct something prettier or more interesting than anything to be found there. This ideal of realism carries many implications bearing more directly upon the practice of the fictionist, and in turning to these matters it should be with the caution that each is best interpreted not as law but in its aspect of positive and constructive observation. Mr. Howells is unfortunately prone to negative constructions that give many of his most rational statements the air of prohibitory dicta. For example, it is a perfectly valid deduction from the axiom of the essential equality of all experience as enunciated by Valdés that realism will find it a glorious mission to reveal the significance of the long-neglected commonplace. Mr. Howells, however, will have it that the realist must discard all abnormal and unusual manifestations, whatever the criterion for such may be. Such a mannerism can not destroy the value of his criticism, but it does enable his critics to hold high carnival. I have just exhibited Stevenson greeting him as a bondslave and a zealot of the narrowest convictions. He is not that, but he does evidently believe consistency a virtue of weak minds. Consequently, his documents demand copious interlineation. He who runs as he reads had best make a practice of construing as I advise. It will spare him much mental gymnastics if he come to deal with a novelist like Dostoieffski.

Says Mr. Howells of the true realist: "In life he finds nothing insignificant; all tells for destiny and character; nothing that God has made is contemptible. He cannot look upon human life and

declare this or that thing unworthy of notice, any more than the scientist can declare a fact of the material world beneath the dignity of his inquiry."[1] Nothing is truer than this, unless it be the fact that our author in his apostleship of the trivial has made an exceedingly narrow specialization upon its authority. Being a poet, except when he writes in verse, he would teach men to appreciate above all things else the poetry at their doorsteps. His unique gift is that which has enabled him to discover how rich the vein of it is which strikes through the quotidian fact of our existence. He has found it in the inanities of the summer veranda, even in the dreadful routine of receptions and teas. He has found the glow of romance (the phrase will out) not under tropical moons (the shipwreck and adventures of Captain Fenton among the coral islands must be conceded the most ineffective episode in the entire range of his novels,) but in the desolation of snow-locked New England villages. His cry has ever been: "Ah! poor real life which I love, can I make others share the delight I find in thy foolish and insipid face?"[2]

> "As in literature the true artist will shun the use of real events if they are of an improbable character, so the sincere observer of man will not desire to look upon his heroic or occasional phases, but will seek him in his habitual moods of vacancy and tiresomeness. To me, at any rate, he is at such times very precious; and I never perceive him to be so much of a man and a brother as when I feel the pressure of his vast, natural, unaffected dullness. Then I am able to enter confidently into his life and inhabit there, to think his shallow and feeble thoughts, to be moved by his dumb, stupid desires, to be dimly illumined by his stinted inspiration, to share his foolish prejudices, to practice his obtuse selfishness."[3]

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[1] Critism and Fiction, p. 16.

[2] Their Wedding Journey, (1871), (ed. 1889), p. 67.

[3] Ibid., p. 86.

In the early essay on Henry James, Mr. Howells announced that the new school "studies human nature much more in its wonted aspects, and finds its ethical and dramatic examples in the operation of lighter but really not less vital motives. The moving accident is certainly not its trade; and it prefers to avoid all manner of dire catastrophies."[1] A commendable program surely, and one admirably carried out by the confraternity of which Mr. Howells is regarded as chief. The words, however, scarcely indicate the depth to which in these latter days heroes and their grand climaxes have descended in his esteem. He has become sceptical of their occurence in real life. Climaxes as they happen, he told A. Schade van Westrum, are not effective artistically, are not productive of character revelation.[2] His elucidation of this surprising statement was wholly off the mark.

The manifesto of 1882 also declared that the "stories" were all told long ago. Realism throws an overwhelming emphasis upon character. Human character, it maintains, is the movelist's proper field; any contriving of plots is to be discouraged as false and mechanical. Stevenson offered the writer a choice: he might either let his characters make the plot or provide characters necessary to work out a preconceived scheme of events. For the realist, the second, with whatever dexterity it be accomplished, is the incomparably lower form of art. Every event, barring accident and chance, must grow out of human character. (The reservation is not commonly made. In fact, the whole question of circumstance independent of human direction is left rather in the air by dogmatic generalization on this point). Turgeniev is said to have begun his

[1] "Henry James, Jr." in the Century, (1882),3(n.s.):28.

[2] "Mr. Howells on Love and Literature" in Lamp (1904),28:27.

stories by sketching the biography of each personage, formulating completely the tastes, habits, and traits of each, with exhaustive researches genealogical, his readers may well believe, before thinking at all of what they were to do, into what complications their respective propensities were to lead them. Then, thoroughly familiar with his group of imaginary people, he needed only to bring them together into some relationship, when they would proceed to act out the drama for themselves. The ideal method, whether actually realized or not, is for the artist to refrain from all management of affairs, conceiving his office as reporter, not stage director. To generalize magnificently, for the sake of clearness, the plot is the beginning of a romantic tale, and upon its construction the romancer expends arduous labor, while the characters begin a realistic story, the plot being the inevitable result rather than the conscious aim. The realist, Mr. Howells would say, writes "from the beginning forward, and never from the ending backward."[1] Writing from the ending backward is, of course, precisely what Stevenson and Poe recommend in their celebrated essays on the method of composition.

Here again Mr. Howells is characteristically the extremist. His admiration for the Spanish picaresque will be recalled. He urges literary youth to emulate its freedom in structure. He would have no manner of <u>prevision</u>, entire dependence being placed upon <u>revision</u>. If it be found difficult to imagine Turgeniev's perfection the result of such a method, we are informed that the inspiration of freedom from established, preestablished design is capable of crowning a work with "unimagined beauty." The writer as he proceeds is educated out of his mediocrity. For example, the following account

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[1] "The Counsel of Literary Age" in <u>Imaginary Interviews</u> (1910), p.290.

informs how Shakespeare was probably educated by the composition of his immortal Hamlet:

"Probably the playwright started with the notion of making Hamlet promptly kill his step father, rescue Ophelia from the attempt to climb out over the stream on a willow branch, forgive his erring mother as more sinned against than sinning, welcome Laertes back to Denmark, and with the Ghost of his father blessing the whole group, and Polonius with his arm in a sling, severely but not fatally wounded form the sort of stage picture, as the curtain went down, that has sent audiences home dissolved in happy tears, from so many theatres. But Shakespeare, being a dramatist as well as a playwright, learned from Hamlet himself that Hamlet could not end as he had meant him to end. Hamlet, in fact, could not really end at all, and in the sort of anticlimax in which the tragedy closes, he must rise from death, another and a truer ghost than the buried majesty of Denmark, and walk the world forever."[1]

In this matter of plot the realist has his most serious difficulty with the unskilled reader; and the quarrel usually resolves into a rebellion on the part of the "savage" against the ending of the story. It is true that the tawdry and theatrical finale that delighted another generation with the spectacle of everyone from lord and lady to maid and butler ecstatically falling into each other's arms, with the villain safe in the arms of God or the law, has long since been discarded by writers of any pretensions to modernity. The crudest witness, however he may applaud such a delightful consummation, realizes that for the nonce he has forsaken this ill-ordered world and its disappointments. Nevertheless, even in

[1]"The Counsel of Literary Age" in Imaginary Interviews (1910), p. 289.

the most serious work, it is still demanded that the ending be right. Almost any amount of cruel truth will be endured throughout the novel, if only, in some subtile manner, it be contrived that finally he shall marry her. How many magazines still advise their contributors to shun the "artistic ending!"

This is a matter, however, upon which readers have small cause to quarrel with Mr. Howells. Henry James, indeed, found no endings in life, no "stories," only episodes; hence, conceiving the height of veracity to be attained by transcribing our existence in its episodical nature, he declined to end many of his compositions at all. But such perversity Mr. Howells only commends from afar. He finds definite endings in life, and constantly supplies them in his fiction. He has, in fact, been accused of bidding for popularity in his easy descensions to the conventional. Without such presumption of motive, one may safely say that he is rather too fond of giving his characters in marriage.

How splendid if our tellers of tales could realize that classicism is not dead! Aristotle voiced a timeless truth for the narrative art when he prescribed for the drama a beginning, a middle, and an end. No story is brought about except through an unstable situation; and no meaning can be given a story except by resolving that situation to some sort of concluding status. The misapprehension lies in the artist's assumption that, having discarded marriage, death, and like catastrophes, he has discarded this concluding status. That may be wholly spiritual. The novelist's understanding of life may widen and deepen even though his aesthetics does not keep pace. Some of the clumsy introductions and conclusions of Balzac and Turgeniev bear witness to an art not only in ad-

vance of the readers to whom them they seem loath to commit it, but ever so little beyond their own comprehension of its fineness. Can one imagine Turgeniev's Liza (Nest of Nobles) inconclusive? Yet hear Him:

"'And is that the end?' the unsatisfied reader may perhaps ask. 'What became of Lavretsky afterwards? and of Liza?' But what can one say about people who are still alive, but who have already quitted the worldly stage? Why should we turn back to them? It is said that Lavretsky has visited the distant convent in which Liza has hidden herself--and has seen her. etc."

Old notions of poetic justice, of awarding happiness to virtue and punishment to vice, have been consigned to the realm of fairy tales. Their extinction in serious fiction has naturally wrought havoc with old-fashioned methods of story telling, but it is lamentable that their passing should have given rise to the notion that the higher art must consist in being inconclusive. There is a high art which weaves life into a shimmering and iridescent tapestry of impressions; a fair portion of Henry James interests us only by its exceeding fineness and cunning of texture; it is memorable in its vividness, delicacy, and variety of nuance. Such art may without undue deprecation be distinguished as decadent realism, not degenerate in the sense of Lombroso and Nordau, but specialized, as Mr. Havelock Ellis has it in his study of Karl Huysmans, where he speaks of the breaking up of the whole for the benefit of its parts.[1] The classic realism of The Rise of Silas Lapham and The

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[1] "Technically, a decadent style is only such in relation to a classic style. It is simply a further development of a classic style, a further specialisation, the homogeneous, in Spencerian phraseology, having become heterogeneous. The first is beautiful

Landlord at Lion's Head, in contradistinction, subordinates the parts to the whole. It prizes more consistently the larger contours; an overarching moral purpose proves it of no distant kin to George Eliot and Hawthorne. Realism that is true to type summons us unequivocally to inspect the results of the play, but compells our glance inward, upon the secret places of the soul. It is cruelly careless of suffering innocence and unpunished guilt, because it has found the world thus careless. But experience has given full conviction that every heart according to its capacity is subject to a justice not to be reckoned in this world's coin.

However futile the quest for happiness, goodness has ever its reward of inward peace; and whatever of happiness may be purchased at the price of sin, the guilty soul lives ever with an inward unrest. It is this lesson which few are strong enough to realize. Maggie Tulliver divined it before it was too late, when she left Stephen Guest at the inn in Mudport:

"But she raised her eyes and met his with a glance that was filled with the anguish of regret--not with yielding. 'No--not with my whole heart and soul, Stephen,' she said, with timid resolution. 'I have never consented to it with my whole mind. There are memories and affections, and longings after perfect goodness, that have such a strong hold on me; they would never quit me for long; they would come back and be pain to me--repentance. I couldn't live in peace if I put the shadow of a wilful sin between myself and God.

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because the parts are subordinated to the whole; the second is beautiful because the whole is subordinated to the parts. Among our own early prose writers Sir Thomas Browne represents the type of decadence in style. Swift's prose is classic, Pater's decadent."------ Affirmations, Boston, Houghton, (2d ed.) 1915. p. 175.

I have caused sorrow already--I know--I feel it; but I have never deliberately consented to it; I have never said, "They shall suffer, that I may have joy." It has never been my will to marry you; if you were to win consent from the monentary triumph of my feeling for you, you would not have my whole soul. If I could wake back again into the time before yesterday, I would choose to be true to my calmer affections, and live without the joy of love.'"

It is the glory of George Eliot and of Tolstoi in the freest and most untrammeled reaches of their art to have translated these simple problems into vividly real, ineffaceable, and universally intelligible terms. Mr. Howells, who wings a lower flight than either, has been no less triumphant in revealing the operation of identical motives in lighter but profoundly significant aspects. He has found his particular metier the analysis of the moral life in its wonted routine, as it fails of the clarifying and compelling support of tremendous crises. It is, in fact, characteristic of his people to learn very little on the earthly sojourn. Those, like Silas Lapham, who learn comparatively much whose opportunities, so to speak, have been commensurate with their capacities, are rare in his work, and should be correspondingly popular with readers. His supreme artistic creation, Jeff Durgin, the landlord at Lion's Head, is a study, without parallel in our literature, of the tragedy of worldly success which meets no effective opposition, of the insidious selfishness which has its way with a nature too strong to be tempted into crime and too fortunate to be called to a reckoning with itself in any large moral crisis. It is a subtle and marvellous weighing of the imponderable elements which we can observe in ourselves and our brothers making for callousness of soul and insuf-

ficient living.

This tremendous moral force with which realism has endowed modern art, so different from the false and clumsy didacticism of an earlier day, is to Mr. Howells the largest aspect of the school he champions. Veracity to life is his test of morality in art, but it is more; it is scarcely too much to say that with him it is a religion of art. And this ethical, even religious, import of realism so far from being at variance with its aesthetic credo, is believed the very source and origin of all sound artistry. The endeavor to be true not symbolically but actually has indeed been the greatest stimulus to technique that the art of fiction has known.

The modern artist is a scientist in method; his responsibility to be veracious obliges him to remain an impassive witness of his drama; his ideal is one of self-obliteration, detachment, objectivity. The old, undramatic, subjective, intuitive method which licensed all manner of pleading, excusing, explaining, and interpreting, is little short of an insult to the modern reader. Comments and judgments, like those of Thackeray, sometime highly valued as an expression of the author's personality, have no conceivable place in a modern novel. A dramatist would scarcely commit a more grievous artistic sin should he spring upon the boards during the presentation of his play and explain the action to the audience or blame his characters publicly for their misdeeds. This manifestation of the author's personality is, to Mr. Howells' notion, the one thing needful to destroy the value of his research.

It is the crowning tribute to Thackeray's greatness as an artist, that he succeeded in being poignantly dramatic in spite of what Mr. Howells deplores as his tendency "to stand about in his

scene, talking it over with his hands in his pockets, interrupting the action, and spoiling the illusion in which alone the truth of art resides."[1] Our critic, his youthful passion long since cooled, is frequently unjust to Thackeray, but he has given no truer judgment than that his most perfect character, Becky Sharp, actually succeeds in spite of her creator. He tries in vain to distract us by nudges, whispers, and even shouts:

"He is boisterously sarcastic at her expense, as if she were responsible for the defects of her nature, and must be punished for her sins as well as by them. His morality regarding her is the old conventional morality which we are now a little ashamed of, but in his time and place he could scarcely have any other; after all, he was a simple soul, and strictly of his epoch. A later and subtler time must do finer justice to a woman badly born, and reared in dependence and repression; liberated from school to a world where she must fight her own way; taught the evil consciousness of the fascination which she had but which she never felt for men; married to a reprobate aristocrat not her superior in nature, and distinctly her inferior in mind; tempted by ambition and spurred by necessity the greater since she had her husband as well as herself to care for, she was predestined to the course she ran; and she could not have run any other, made as she was, so clever, so pretty, so graceful, so unprincipled."[2]

At the climax in Becky's career, where Rawdon enters unexpectedly upon her supper scene with Lord Steyne, the author, true to his finer instincs, holds his hand, and commits his work to the

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[1] Criticism and Fiction, p. 76.

[2] Heroines of Fiction, v. 1, p. 194.

readers' intelligence. But there is one false and wrong touch in this great and intense scene, explains Mr. Howells with penetrating discernment, which would leave the reader with the impression that Rawdon Crawley is somehow better than she.

Parenthetically, I should like to ask Mr. Howells if although Becky manifestly does rise superior to her creator, he does not detect a possibility that in the matter of the "fascination which she had but which she never felt for men" she succumbed to suppression. Mr. George Moore holds that opinion, and Mr. James Huneker agrees that she probably suffered in the interests of mid-Victorian morality.[1]

This line of criticism was given currency by Taine in his contrast of Thackeray's treatment of Becky Sharp with Balzac's of Valérie Marneffe. "Balzac aime sa Valérie."[2] The English satirist's defenders are, as Professor Brander Matthews complains, prone to ignore the issue and to argue on the ground of Thackeray's virtues, which virtues no one is disposed to deny. Mr. Brownell is an exception to our complaint, maintaining in his spirited essay, which is not free from ineptitudes foreign to his wont, that the great Victorian's mannerisms do not distract the attention, but serve to deepen the illusion.[3]

But, even if desirable, is an ideal of absolute impersonality at all possible of realization? It should be unnecessary to

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[1] James Huneker: Ivory Apes and Peacocks, N. Y., Scribner's, 1915, p. 313.

[2] Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise (1863), (ed. 1911), vol. r, the entire chapter, but especially pp. 110 ff.

[3] Victorian Prose Masters., N. Y., Scribner's, 1901. The entire essay, but especially pp. 9ff.

explain that such an ideal does not seek to limit the fictive art to what is decried as "mere photography," which usually comes down to mean depiction through the media of things perceptible to the five senses. Yet there is much stamping on this ground. Nor would it remove any valuable personal quality. It is an ideal of method purely, and could not make an author's work any the less his own. It proposes justice simply, and that he dispose his materials with such consummate artistry that the awkward explanation and interpretation countenanced by literary convention shall not stand between the reader and the pictured page. Construed thus, and, all said and done, this is what it comes to, the demand loses its character of an onerous restriction and assumes that of a counsel to perfection in the technique of pure narrative.

How far the road toward perfection has been traversed can be noted by none so well as the reader of Giovanni Verga's beautiful story, I Malavoglia, translated by Mary A. Craig under the title: The House by the Medlar-Tree. "When we talk of the great modern movement towards reality," says Mr. Howells in his introduction to the Harper translation, "we speak without the documents if we leave this book out of the count, for I can think of no other novel in which the facts have been more faithfully reproduced, or with a profounder regard for the poetry that resides in facts and resides nowhere else." "He (Verga) seems to have no more sense of authority or supremacy concerning the personages than any one of them would have in telling the story, and he has as completely freed himself from literosity as the most unlettered among them."[1]

The reader who approaches I Malavoglia in spirits for a

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[1] N. Y.,Harper, 1890.

Crawford romance will have his difficulties with the opening chapters. There, nothing is announced, simplified, isolated, or explained; no clues are thrown out to excite the curiosity. It is an actual transportation to the little Sicilian fishing-hamlet where Padron 'Ntoni and his family, Don Silvestro, La Vespa, Cousin Agostino Goosefoot, Uncle Crucifix, Nunziata, a bewildering number, are simultaneously glimpsed at their daily occupations and gossip. By and by the reader who lives with them in Trezza, learns to know them, much as he would become acquainted with the natives of any village in which he might take up a residence, through their daily acts, and the frequently misleading testimony of their neighbors. So far from an omniscient authority, no author is a less competent guide. The whole thing has been cunningly done behind the scenes. It should by all means be avoided by those who take their delight in watching the author simplify, unify, interpret, or what not. The tragic degeneration of 'Ntoni's 'Ntoni is as obscure in its causes as that of any young friend of ours who goes to the bad. With nothing worked up for effect, it is a tragedy of thrilling interest. There is idyllic sweetness in it, too, and humor; a tender beauty along with the darkness and sordidness. There is, as Mr. Howells points out, a profound poetry in its facts; and its sadness is the sadness of life everywhere, especially where, as among such simple peoples as those of Southern Italy and Sicily, men have not yet learned the lessons of humanity and brotherly love; and finally, its lesson is the lesson of life everywhere.

"There, as in every part of the world, and in the whole world, goodness brings not pleasure, not happiness, but it brings peace and rest to the soul, and lightens all burdens; and the trial

and the sorrow go on for good and evil alike; only, those who choose the evil have no peace."[1]

Such supreme veracity as that of Verga, imposes upon the artist a certain restriction in subject matter which is best classed as an aspect of realism. No observer, after a mere season of residence among them, could write as he has done of his fishermen. Verga knows his characters, inwardly and outwardly; he knows the minutiae of their existence, their habits, their traits, and their propensities; he knows their lightest and their profoundest thought. He knows their milieu: every shape, every color in the eyes of his fishermen is seen of him; the sea they strive with is his sea; the grass that grows beneath their feet, his grass. And every realist must, in a sense not demanded of the unifier and simplifier, know his characters and their milieu. George Eliot had her Romola, and Flaubert his Salammbô, astonishing both, and very precious in their respective values, but both artists came home to do their most realistic work.

This is, however, a topic with which the dogmatist may not be allowed to play loose. Sir Walter Besant, in his contribution to the controversy which evoked Henry James' Art of Fiction as well as Stevensons's Humble Remonstrance, came so near dogmatism as to merit James' reproof. Said Besant:

"A young lady brought up in a quiet country village should avoid descriptions of garrison life; a writer whose friends and personal experiences belong to what we call the lower middle class should carefully avoid introducing his characters into society; a

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[1] N. Y., Harper, 1890.

South-countryman would hesitate before attempting to reproduce the North-country accent. This is a very simple rule, but one to which there should be no exception--never to go beyond your own experience."[1]

"What kind of experience is intended," asks James with pertinence, "and where does it begin and end? Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative--much more when it happens to be that of a man of genius--it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations. The young lady living in a village has only to be a damsel upon whom nothing is lost to make it quite unfair (as it seems to me) to declare to her that she shall have nothing to say about the military. Greater miracles have been seen than that, imagination assisting, she should speak the truth about some of these gentlemen."[2] Which elucidates Mr. Chesterton's sage remarks on the "godlike power of guessing" which seems to have been given young ladies like Jane Austen and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and which is not quite guessing after all.[3]

In our country, with its illimitable diversity of color and character, the desire for veracity has led each individual to

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[1] Quoted from Clayton Hamilton's Materials and Methods of Fiction (1911), p. 35.

[2] Partial Portraits, Lond., Macmillan, 1888, p. 388.

[3] G. K. Chesterton: The Victorian Age in Literature, N.Y., Holt, 1913.

cultivate his own little garden-patch, resulting in a library of "local color," descriptive in the aggregate, of the entire continent. Verisimilitude has become a passion; inexactitude in the matter of a bit of costume, a turn of speech, a rock, a plant, a bird, or a tree, has become a serious literary offence. If this mechanical accuracy were all, it would perhaps not be so important, but that is only one expression of a spirit that penetrates to the heart of things. With it has come a new technique, which promises a perfection of artistry, and, more wonderful than all, that spirit of democracy in literature which is the soul of modern realism. Nothing in our literary history appears to Mr. Howells quite so amazing as the promptitude with which the effete romanticism of the South, so direly afflicted with Walter-Scottism and Fenimore-Cooperism, when it once too the breath of realistic life, abandoned its former absurdities, and became great in our literature. Yet this must always happen when the sense for the real is awakened and the pilgrimage to the shrine of Truth begun. Out-worn ideals are discredited; "literature (Mr. Howells' translation from De Sanctis, the historian of Italian letters) undergoes transformation. The ugly stands beside the beautiful; or rather, there is no longer ugly or beautiful, neither ideal nor real, neither infinite nor finite..... There is but one thing only, the Living."

V. HIS POETRY AND TRAVELS

Mr. Howells' contribution to miscellaneous literature, that is, literature exclusive of the fiction--novels, stories, and plays--upon which his reputation hangs, is enormous. For this brief chapter, which is rather in the nature of an intermezzo, I choose two forms which he has consistently cultivated, the one for which he is strongly to be suspected of having a predilection, and the one for which I certainly have. In no department of his work do I get so fine and so complete a sense of his authorship as in these companionable and wholly delectable volumes of Italian, Spanish, and English wanderings. His poetry, on the other hand, is a thing apart. This is necessarily so, since his maîtresse qualité of whole-souled geniality is fatally absent from his verse. But to say that it inadequately represents him, is to understate the case. It represents better the literosity of his youth at which he now pokes fun. It displaces the humanity which informs every page of his prose with an intensely personal threnody on the sadness of the human lot.

The aspirations of his youth were altogether toward poetry. Of the time (1860) of the memorable New England pilgrimage, he writes: "Inwardly I was a poet, with no wish to be anything else,

unless in a moment of careless affluence I might so far forget myself as to be a novelist. I was, with my friend J. J. Piatt, the half-author of a little volume of very unknown verse, and Mr. Lowell had lately accepted and had begun to print in the Atlantic Monthly five or six poems of mine. Besides this I had written poems, and sketches, and criticisms for the Saturday Press of New York, a long-forgotten but once very lively expression of literary intention in an extinct bohemia of that city; and I was always writing poems, and sketches, and criticisms in our own paper."[1]

The Poems of Two Friends (1860) alluded to, did not quite, as he somewhere else depreciatingly avers, become "instantly and lastingly unknown to fame." Lowell noticed the book in the Atlantic, albeit without the enthusiasm he came later to indulge for one of its authors. Nevertheless, it is now the property of bibliophiles, being the rarest with one exception of the Howells books. It has a history to delight collectors. Lida R. McCabe is authority for the statement that (1898) Mr. Howells himself does not possess a copy.[2] Its failure, however, did not dishearten the young poet; he composed assiduously during his Venetian consulate, and assaulted with little success editorial offices on both sides of the water. After his return, when he became an editor himself, publication seems to have come more easily; and in 1869 No Love Lost, a Romance of Travel, in his favorite hexameters, was reprinted from Putnam's Magazine in the form of a little gift book, to be floated, perhaps, on the success of Venetian Life. This booklet is also somewhat rare,

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1. Literary Friends and Acquaintance, p. 1.

2. Lida R. McCaba: "One Never Can Tell," in the Outlook (1898), 59: 131.

the copy I use having been acquired, according to the librarian's annotation, in 1899 at an expense of two dollars and fifty cents. The poem, however, is available, Mr. Howells having allowed it to survive in the latest edition of his Poems. These Poems were first collected in 1873, and have enjoyed two subsequent editions with slight alteration of contents (1885 and 1901). Two other volumes of single authorship are devoted to verse, Stops of Various Quills (1895), and The Mother and the Father; Dramatic Passages (1909); while recent specimens are included in the prose and verse miscellany, The Daughter of the Storage (1916).

The early productions are redolent of Heine and Longfellow, Heine dominating those in lyric mood, which frequently suggest Longfellow's translations from the German. The Heinesque manner and atmosphere are tempered by the lingering pathos of the American poet, whose influence is more clearly discernible in the narrative numbers. The perfection of form, the compression, and the poignancy of the Heine lieder are seldom attained in these lyrics. Metrically, they are surprisingly uneven, coming from one so ardently trained in the school of Pope. I find it a little odd that Lowell should so strenuously have objected to the coinage "silvern" (on analogy with golden, leathern, and the like) in the stanza which follows, and should not have suggested ways and means towards a more ingratiating rhythmical effect.

"The silvern chords of the piano trembled
Still with the music wrung
From them; the silence of the room dissembled
The closes of the songs that she had sung."[1]

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[1] "Forlorn" in Poems (ed. 1901), p. 13

The pieces are seldom marred by harsh or faulty lines, but as seldom rise to high distinction. In some, such as "Pleasure-Pain" ("Das Vergnügen ist Nichts als ein höchst angenehmer Schmerz." - Heine),[1] the lyric mood and the lyric measure sustain each other over a considerable length.

Of the narrative poems, The Pilot's Story, though by no means the best, is by far the best known, due to the quite comprehensible vogue which it enjoyed in its day. It was widely exchanged, sometimes to the youthful poet's chagrin, being printed as prose. Lincoln's secretaries, Hay and Nicolay, knew young Howells as its author, not merely as the author of the Life of Lincoln which was their immediate concern. It recounts through the lips of a Mississippi pilot a melodramatic episode depicting the horrors of slavery. Louise, a beautiful octoroon, is gambled away at monte to a villain of long black hair and moustaches. Overwhelmed by this confession from her weak master, who had promised her her freedom for the sake of their little boy in Saint Louis, and terrified at the approach of the gambler, she hurls herself from the stern of the steamer and is plowed under by the wheel.

The poem came upon the mid-century revival of the hexameter, established in this country by Longfellow, and Mr. Howells has never outgrown the penchant he then acquired for the meter. In the descriptive interlude and conclusion, the master has his inning. The rhythm is not bad in simple and straight-forward passages, but the imagery is far less felicitously conceived than is Longfellow's wont. Critics who carp at the tendency of Longfellow to strain a simile will not be pleased with the metrical tales of Howells.

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[1] Poems (ed. 1901), p. 19.

For my part, I have never consented to hear maligned the boldness in simplicity of some of the Longfellow metaphors.

"Silently one by one, in the infinite meadows of heaven,
Blossomed the lovely stars, the forget-me-nots of the angels."

This in the Pilot's Story, however, lapses easily into banality:

"Softly the sunset had faded, and now on the eastern horizon
"Hung, like a tear in the sky, the beautiful star of the evening."[1]

Louis Lebeau's Conversion (p.32), Clement (p.86), and others of the sketches and tales are saturate with Evangeline. But Mr. Howells reinforced the impulse to write hexameters given by Longfellow, going, as did Bayard Taylor, directly to the eighteenth-century German popularizers of the measure. He has studied Kingsley's Andromeda also, but we take his word for that; the influence of the supreme English exemplar is hardly to be detected in his handling. The sketch entitled The Movers is reminiscent of Hermann und Dorothea.

"Parting was over at last, and all the good-bys had been spoken
Up the long hillside road the white-tented wagon moved slowly,
Bearing the mother and children, while onward before them the father
Trudged with his gun on his arm, and the faithful house-dog beside him,
Grave and sedate, as if knowing the sorrowful thoughts of his master.

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1 Poems (ed. 1901), p. 9.

"April was in her prime, and the day in its dewy awaking:
Like a great flower, afar on the crest of the eastern woodland,
Goldenly bloomed the sun, and over the beautiful valley,
Dim with its dew and shadow, and bright with its dream of a river,
Looked to the western hills, and shone on the humble procession,
Paining with splendor the children's eyes, and the heart of the mother."[1]

Tennyson, almost a twin-idol with Longfellow, contributes somewhat to the versification, but his effect is more clearly discernible in the sentiment. It is when in Stops of Various Quills the mood of doubt struggling with belief becomes a dominant motif, that Tennyson comes into his own. Our poet was never a Browning enthusiast but the roughness of No Love Lost, the worst poem in the collection, and the one curiously chosen for separate publication, savors more of Browning than of any other master we have mentioned, without, however, attaining Browning's weight, virility, or choiceness. I quote the envoy, which is the realistic touch to this very romantic tale, but that fact does not account for the meter.

"Well, I'm glad, I am sure, if Fanny supposes she's happy.
I've no doubt her lover is good and noble--as men go.
But,as regards his release of a woman who'd wholly forgot him,
And whom he loved no longer, for one whom he loves, and who loves him,
I don't exactly see where the heroism commences."[2]

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1 Poems (ed. 1901), p. 115.

2 Ibid., p. 198.

When we come to Stops of Various Quills, it is distressing to feel that the pessimism, so purely a literary mood as it informs the Poems, is assuming the cast and complexion of a philosophy. And it is all pervasive. Howard Pyle, who illustrates the book lavishly, has expressed it perfectly, albeit after the German mythological manner of the Boecklin school. The baubles of the mask, the death's head, the thorns, and the bitter chalice are its symbols. The fiddler Death, or the grim reaper with sickle and glass, stalks through its pages while angels weep and mortals bid him stay. Melancholia is written large over all. "The Bewildered Guest" is most quoted, a sonnet, of which form the book includes several specimens.

"I was not asked if I should like to come.
I have not seen my host here since I came,
Or had a word of welcome in his name.
Some say that we shall never see him, and some
That we shall see him elsewhere, and then know
Why we were bid. How long I am to stay
I have not the least notion. None, they say,
Was ever told when he should come or go.
But every now and then there bursts upon
The song and mirth a lamentable noise,
A sound of shrieks and sobs, that strikes our joys
Dumb in our breasts; and then, some one is gone.
They say we meet him. None knows where or when.
We know we shall not meet him here again."[1]

The number immediately preceding this, "From Generation to Generation," counsels the bright throng of innocent spirits unborn

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[1] Stops of Various Quills (1895), Number five (Being an art-book, the work is unpaginated.)

to shun this evil star. But, alas, they cry in chorus:

"The doom is on us, as it is on you,
That nothing can undo;
And all in vain you warn:
As your fate is to die, our fate is to be born."

The logic is hardly worthy of a Schopenhauer, for our poet fears but a changeless grave; and the conclusion of his philosophy as voiced in "What Shall if Profit," number forty-three, is Tennysonian.

"If I lay waste and wither up with doubt
The blessed fields of heaven where once my faith
Possessed itself serenely safe from death;
If I deny the things past finding out;
Or if I orphan my own soul of One
That seemed a Father, and make void the place
Within me where He dwelt in power and grace,
What do I gain by that I have undone?"

It is easy to exaggerate the importance of these verses. Their greater depth and originality will blind one to the fact that they are, even as the earlier and imitative ones, literary exercises. They can be correlated only with the inferior prose, such as some of the sociological essays. Believe no one who tells you that the great novels like A Hazard of New Fortunes are poisoned by pessimism. Philosophy has indeed been a delusive plaything for Mr. Howells; I should not for one moment presume to say that it has not cost him pain. But in his major work, where his sense of the present and the real is irrepressible, the infection is hardly toxic in its effect upon the whole.

In craftmanship, the verse of Stops of Various Quills

varies as widely as that of the Poems. "Materials for a Story" and "Labor and Capital" are not in the least improved by rime (the latter is a splendid "impression," which a French poet would have put into memorable prose), while "The Bewildered Guest" just quoted and the probably superior "If" (number thirteen) discover our poet at the apogee of his art.

Moreover, the impression left by the two remaining volumes which I shall mention, is of retrogression. The Mother and the Father; Dramatic Passages, which in content seeks to realize the emotions of a mother and a father in the presence of the great facts of birth, marriage, and death, cries as loudly for prose as did No Love Lost, but is happier than the Venetian tale in attaining a really excellent prose. On the whole, it is less metrical than Lorna Doone. I cite almost at random a good conversational sentence.

"Oh no; you only
Said that you did not know, and I have only
Bettered your ignorance a little and said
I knew. Women must have some faith or other
Even if they make a faith of disbelief."[1]

The Daughter of the Storage is not a treasure-trove, although it does contain two of the gem-like farces in which its author is unapproachable. Concerning the poetry, small wonder indeed that it should have been heralded in I fail to recall which of the New York Sunday editions by a front-page review with portrait, as Mr. Howells' initial venture into vers libre, and as a sort of official approval conferred by literary authority upon the free forms. Unfortunately, this reviewer was mistaken. There is not an

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[1] The Mother and the Father (1909), p. 27.

authentic piece of vers libre in the collection. I say this, however, with a confidence which I do not feel in ascribing specific metrical intentions to individual poems. I can maintain only to be personally persuaded that "Captain Dunlevy's Last Trip" is in no other meter than our old favorite hexameter; and Southey never did worse by it.

"It was against the law, in such case made and provided,
Of the United States, but by the good will of the pilots
That we would some of us climb to the pilot-house after our breakfast.
For a morning smoke, and find ourselves seats on the benching
....."[1]

"The Face at the Window" shows clearly a return to its author's first love, the heroic couplet.

"He had gone down at Christmas, where our host
Had opened up his house on the Maine coast
For the week's holidays, and we were all,
On Christmas night, sitting in the great hall,"[2]

A diary recently recovered in a storage warehouse and used by Mr. Howells in the composition of Years of My Youth furnished an interesting specimen of the early Popeian imitations. "I have no facts to support my conjecture," he remarks in submitting it, "but I will hazard the belief that the winter of 1851-2 was largely given to producing and polishing this plaster-of-paris masterpiece." He forbears mockery out of reverence for the boy who long ago strove so fervently to realize an ideal, albeit an ideal which the man branded

[1] The Daughter of the Storage (1914), p. 67.

[2] Ibid., p. 107.

as false. However, I will go into court and say in defence of the same boy that his pastoral, imitative though it be, makes better reading than "The Face at the Window." One does not have to lower one's evaluation of the informing ideal one jot in saying that in the presence of so abysmal a technical falling off it must content itself with second place. I can scarce forbear repeating all we have of the pastoral, which concerns one Corydon, in evidence of this. I give young Corydon's first round at the song; his competitors, unhappily, do not appear.

"Now ceases Philomel her nightly strain,
And trembling stars forsake the etherial plain;
Pale Luna fades and down the distant West
Sadly and slowly lowers her rayless crest;
But yellow Phoebus pours his beams along
And linnets sport where Philomela sung.
Here robins chirp and joyful orioles sing
Where late the owlet flapped his noiseless wing;
Here the pale lily spreads its petals wide,
And snowy daisies deck the green hillside;
Here violets' bloom with waterflowers wreath,
And forest blossoms scent the Zephyr's breath.
Fit spot for song where Spring in every flower
Rich incense offers to the morning hour.
Then let us sing! The hour is meet for love,
The plain, the vale, the music-breathing grove;
Let gentle Daphnis judge the doubtful song,
And soft Aeolus bear the notes along.
I stake my pipe with whose soft notes I while
The tedious hours, and my toil beguile;
Whose mellow voice gives joy serener charms,
And grief of half its bitterness disarms."[1]

In taking leave of the poetry and turning to the books of travel, we approach something inconceivably different, something which those who would make much of Mr. Howells' pessimism should omit from the count. Beggars, indeed, touch his sensibilities more keenly than they used to, but one must go to the sociological essays to prove that they becloud his Weltanschauung. Each new record of

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[1] Years of My Youth (1916), pp. 76-77.

his wanderings pays fresh tribute to his youth and vitality. I complained that his poetry did not fairly represent him, and that its technical deficiencies sometimes become positively prohibitive of enjoyment. In both respects the travels are antipodal. His ingratiating prose is here to be enjoyed at its best, its very best; and, so far from constituting, so to speak, a private department of his work, these volumes are all of a piece with it. It is a significant fact that his fiction had its genesis in the sketches of travel, the first novel, Their Wedding Journey, being nothing more nor less than a magnified sketch. The reason is not obscure, since his special province lies in the depiction of manners, and in the handling of the more ephemeral revelations of character, or, as the injudicious will have it, the depiction of externals and the handling of superficial aspects.

In these sketches, begun with a journalistic intent, he achieved a contact with reality which his more "literary" verse was incapable of affording. This he did not see very clearly, so firmly had been ingrained the notion that poetry was the occupation for a literary man. His earliest reading and writing had been poetry; the first literary heroes whom he met in the flesh were poets--men like Bayard Taylor--the very first, Lowell, and Longfellow. Indeed, when he joined the circle of the New England elect, he found the type of literary man to be the poet. Difficult, therefore, as it may be to understand why he was born for mediocrity in the orthodox versification, or why without the originality to spurn the orthodox forms of expression and evolve new ones for himself, as did Whitman and others, it is not at all difficult to understand why he should have failed to recognize in himself the consummate prosateur that

he was. Lowell felt this better than he--another proof of the blindness of self-criticism. The phenomenon is repeated in his hesitancy in making the transition from the simpler style of prose narrative displayed in these chronicles to the more highly organized type of the novels.

I cannot say that Mr. Howells' reputation will ever rest upon these writings, which I have enjoyed so much more than any save two or three of his greatest novels. The critic who would hazard such a prediction should first ask to see what records of actual travel have resisted the corrosive tooth of time. What has put a blight upon this charming genre, so that its choicest specimen will perish before the time of a novel or voyage imaginaire? Let us not indulge in mystical jargon about the power of the imagination. The sufficient fact is, as Mr. Howells realized when he made the transition to fiction, that the great and permanent interest of mankind is in man, in the study of human character; and in dealing solely with the actual the author is fatally handicapped in this study, the real, of course, in the novelist's sense having nothing to do with the actual. It has sometimes been Mr. Howells' error to give us in his novels things which might well be actual but which are not of significance as reality. Had he done no more than this, I should instantly predict that the travel books would long outlive the novels.

The letters which became Venetian Life appeared first in the Boston Advertiser, having been vainly offered "to more aesthetic periodicals,"[1] and at once enlisted the admiration of Mr. Howells' diplomatic chief, John Lothrop Motley, the historian, and of Lowell, who wrote: "They make the most careful and picturesque study I have

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[1] Literary Friends and Acquaintance, p. 92.

ever seen on any part of Italy. They are the thing itself."[1] Which is lavish praise, considering the plethoric literature about Italy, especially Venice, quantities of which must have been known to the Italianate Lowell. The publication of these letters in book form (1866) laid the foundation of Mr. Howells Literary success, and so frequently is misunderstanding displayed concerning the facts of that transaction that I give the account in his own words.

> "Before I left Venice I had made my sketches into a book, which I sent on to Messrs. Trübner & Co., in London. They had consented to look at it to oblige my friend Conway, who during his sojourn with us in Venice, before his settlement in London, had been forced to listen to some of it. They answered me in due time that they would publish an edition of a thousand, at half profits, if I could get some American house to take five hundred copies. When I stopped in London I had so little hope of being able to do this that I asked Trübners if I might, without losing their offer, try to get some other London house to publish my book. They said Yes, almost joyously; and I began to take my manuscript about. At most places they would not look at me or it, and they nowhere consented to read it. The house promptest in refusing to consider it afterwards pirated one of my novels, and with some expressions of good intention in that direction, never paid me anything for it; though I believe the English still think that this sort of behavior was peculiar to the American publisher in the old buccaneering times. I was glad to go back to the Trübners with my book, and on my way across the Atlantic I met a publisher who finally agreed to take those five hundred copies. This was Mr. M. M. Hurd, of Hurd and Houghton, a house then newly established in New York and Cambridge. We played ring-toss and shuffleboard together, and became of a friendship which lasts to this day. But it was not till some months later, when I saw him in New York, that he consented to publish my book. I remember how he said, with an air of vague misgiving, and an effect of trying to justify himself in an imprudence, that it was not a great matter anyway. I perceived that he had no faith in it, and to tell the truth I had mot much myself. But the book had an instant success, and it has gone on from edition to edition ever since. There was just then the interest of a not wholly generous surprise at American things among the English. Our success in putting down the great Confederate rebel-

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[1] "Lowell and Howells," Harper's Weekly (1902), 46:101.

> lion had caught the fancy of our cousins, and I think it was to this mood of theirs that I owed largely the kindness they showed my book. There were long and cordial reviews in all the great London journals, which I used to carry about with me like love-letters; when I tried to show them to other people, I could not understand their coldness concerning them."[1]

The following year (1867), Hurd followed up the success of Venetian Life with Italian Journeys, some half dozen papers of which had appeared in the Nation after being returned unprinted by the Advertiser, unaesthetic journal indeed! The long and scholarly article on "Ducal Mantua" is from the North American Review for January, 1866. The next bona fide travel book, Tuscan Cities (1886), is a worthy sequel to Italian Journeys. In 1892 Messrs. Harper added to their "Black and White" series A Little Swiss Sojourn, in the Canton Vaud, at Montreux, Vevay, and Villeneuve. Beginning with London Films in 1905, a book that leaves one with lasting regret that Mr. Howells has not found Paris a field for his "mental kodak," they come apace: Certain Delightful English Towns; with Glimpses of the Pleasant Country Between (1906), Roman Holidays, and Others (1908), Seven English Cities (1909), and Familiar Spanish Travels (1913). To which must be added The Seen and Unseen at Stratford-on-Avon; a Fantasy (1914), although the delight of that book lies in its fantastic satire on the Baconian authorship theory.

It is alleged by those who find Mr. Howells a romancer who has repressed his natural proclivities in order to be "in the movement," that the earliest volume, Venetian Life, is suffused with a certain "glow" which is lacking in the later ones. Mr. Pattee makes much of the point.[2] Now, the detection of this aura is in all prob-

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[1] Literary Friends and Acquaintance, p. 101
[2] A History of American Literature Since 1870 (1915), pp. 147-249.

ability a matter too impressionistic in character to be made the subject of controversy. It may well be that my organ for perceiving it has undergone sclerosis. I can only say, therefore, that I am able to detect no quality in Venetian Life that does not abound in the succeeding works. There is as much exotic color in Familiar Spanish Travels, and what that book may lack in exuberant spirits is amply made up in Certain Delightful English Towns. The wonder is, in very fact, how any traveler, whatever his aesthetic persuasion, could have maintained such joy in the foreign scene.

Moreover, Venetian Life is a document rich as any in disillusion. If the "glow" is conceived to consist in an abrogation of the Heinesque trick of disillusionment (I reiterate, I do not know in what it is supposed to consist), the early work has small claim indeed to its possession; for this trick is essentially a mannerism of youth which becomes presently more discreet. To observe it at its baldest, one must see the letters written to the Cincinnati Gazette[1] which preceded the Venetian letters; and when we come to the very late English books it is tempered by a noticeable infusion of Washington Irving. It may confidently be called a mannerism, for our author's resemblances to Heine are in reality exceedingly superficial. He cannot hate; at any rate he cannot bite swiftly and keenly; but more than all he lacks Heine's power of sustained emotion. He has, in fact, a more natural affinity in Daudet; for often when he is most critical he is most truly simpatico. But the mood, such as it is, is characteristic of all the travel books. He has never ceased to be amusingly critical of the emotions of himself and of

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[1] Since these are inaccessible, see "Niagara, First and Last" in The Niagara Book, N.Y., Doubleday, Page, 1901 (Buffalo, Underhill & Nichols, 1893).

others. In Venetian Life we have as little moonshine as anywhere, an even more deliberate hand being brought to the demolition of the romantic Italy of Byron.

Mr. Howells seldom passes up an opportunity for a jibe at the noble lord. He has been ungenerous enough to attempt a blot at the splendor of the bard's reputation as a swimmer. Childe Harold appears to be his vade mecum of what not to feel in Italy. The lament,

"In Venice Tasso's echoes are no more,
And silent rows the songless gondolier;"

is clearly the inspiration of the following bit of archery in which he draws a bow as long as does the sentimental pilgrim.

"As for the singing of the gondoliers, they are the only class of Venetians who have not good voices, and I am scarcely inclined to regret the silence which long ago fell upon them. I am quite satisfied with the peculiar note of warning which they utter as they approach the corner of a canal, and which meaning simply, 'To the Right,' or 'To the Left,' is the most pathetic and melancholy sound in the world. If, putting aside my own comfort, I have sometimes wished for the sake of a dear, sentimental old friend at home, who loves such idle illusions with an ardor unbecoming his years, that I might hear the voice

'of Adris's gondolier,
By distance mellowed, o'er the waters sweep,'

I must still confess that I never did hear it under similar circumstances, except in conversation across half a mile of lagoon, when, as usual, the burden of the lay was polenta or soldi."[1]

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[1] Venetian Life (ed. 1896), p. 337.

Sometimes rudely and sometimes tenderly the cherished delusions of travelers in those days are laid to rest. The rudeness of the sentimental pilgrimage to the "Prigione di Tasso" in Ferrara, "the coal-cellar in which was never imprisoned the poet whose works I had not read,"[1] is in part due to the fact that it concerns one of the dungeons where the noble bard had himself locked up. This is recounted in the Italian Journeys, on the whole a more enjoyable book than Venetian Life. The humor is airier. I should not know how to match the lugubrious voyage from Genoa to Naples, on which they envied "the bones of the Venetians, Pisans, and Genoese who met and slew each other in the long-forgotten sea-fights, and sank too deeply through the waves to be stirred by their restless tumult,"[2] unless it would be with the doleful crossing of Daudet's Tartarin of Tarascon, when that dauntless hunter set out to depopulate Africa of lions.

As a painter of sky and sea, Mr. Howells is not inimitable. The magic canvass of Pierre Loti is not for him; and the chromatics of Gautier are beyond the resources of his palette. He seldom evokes an atmosphere with the swift saliency of De Maupassant, or lingers in the descriptive mood with the loving eye of a plastic artist as does Henry James, who learned the secrets of light from the impressionistic painters. He attains an idyllic touch in the English books, but the chief charm of his work resides in the vivid sense of reality which accrues from the cinematographic succession of images. "I try to give the reader," he confesses in Tuscan Cities, " a true impression of the sweet confusion of travel in those old lands."[3]

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[1] Italian Journeys (ed. 1896), p. 14.
[2] Ibid., p. 69.
[3] Tuscan Cities (ed. 1894), p. 222.

And this book displays more clearly than any other perhaps his deftness in catching the fleeting bit of life or scene, so pregnant, and so elusive: a cab-driver, a vender with his tray of Chianti flasks, a weather-beaten fragment of statuary, a group of cypresses, or an anemone blowing in the March wind. The episodic dramas of the street attract him mightily, out of all proportion, some will say, to their significance; and he is superbly happy in depicting the color and movement of crowds.

Some will be disappointed that Mr. Howells is so ignorant a technician in the other arts than his own. He takes Michael Angelo's "light of the piazza" in deadly earnest as a criterion for judging painting and statuary, a criterion of great assistance to Tolstoi in condemning the "Last Judgment." But we surely suffer no dearth of technical writing on Italian painting, and should be properly grateful that Mr. Howells has been true to himself in refraining from ready-made appreciations. On this point, Maurice Hewlett is in accord, the burden of whose preambulatory remarks to The Road in Tuscany is: "Let cooks take delight in the mixing of dishes, but let gentlemen eat of them."[1] As for describing architecture, Mr. Howells holds it a sin, if not a bore. On the other hand, he is an authority on the fine art of mendicancy in its protean forms, and a connoisseur in birds and flowers.[2] Yet in regard to the scenic properties of architecture, I am going to say that his lively appreciation is fertile not only in conceiving just characterizations, as

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[1] Maurice Hewlett. The Road in Tuscany, N.Y., Macmillan, 1904, p. 15.

[2] Vide. Certain Delightful English Towns, N.Y., Harper, 1906, pp. 10,23,176.

often as not in the form of droll personifications, but in indicating points of view which have escaped more sophisticated observers.[1]

The all-pervading characteristic of his descriptive method is his inability to keep the human element out of the landscape for even a paragraph of moderate length. Of course, secne-painting as we come upon it in Radcliffe, Scott,and Cooper, is a lost art, but Henry James and Edith Wharton, not to mention Kipling and Conrad, do enthrall the reader in his own emotions, making him directly the spectator, a procedure of which Mr. Howells makes one of his characters express a certain scepticism. The passage occurs in The Story of a Play, and is even more applicable to these travels than to the novel. Maxwell the playwright and Louise sit swinging on their cottage veranda.

".....The sea came and went among the rocks below, marking its course in the deepening twilight with a white rope of foam, and raving huskily to itself, with now and then the long plunge of some heavier surge against the bowlders, and a hoarse shout. The Portland boat swam by in the offing, a glitter of irregular lights, and the lamps on the different points of the Cape blinked as they revolved in their towers. 'This is the kind of thing you can get only in a novel,' said Maxwell, musingly. 'You couldn't possibly give the feeling of it in a play.'

"'Couldn't you give the feeling of the people looking at it? suggested his wife, and she put out her hand to lay it on his. 'Yes, you could do that,' he assented, with pleasure in her notion; 'and that would be better. I suppose that is what would be aimed at

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[1] Vide. Certain Delightful English Towns, N.Y., Harper, 1906, p. 224. Chester Cathedral.

in a description of the scene, which would be tiresome if it didn't give the feeling of the spectator.'"[1]

This feeling of the spectator is seldom wanting in Mr. Howells' descriptions. People are little short of an obsession with him; and when they are absent from the scene, he goes into the by-ways and hedges and compels them to come in. When he forsakes the mid-day throng to view a city in the silence of night, he steals back almost before one is aware. I should like to quote a bit of Carlsbad from Their Silver Wedding Journey in illustration of this, but surrender it in favor of Venice.

> ".....I remember distinctly among the beautiful nights of that time, the soft night of late winter which first showed me the scene you may behold from the Public Gardens at the end of the long concave line of the Riva degli Schiavoni. Lounging there upon the southern parapet of the Gardens, I turned from the dim bell-towers of the evanescent islands in the east (a solitary gondola gliding across the calm of the water, and striking its moonlight silver into multitudinous ripples), and glanced athwart the vague shipping in the basin of St. Mark, and saw all the lights from the Piazzetta to the Giudecca, making a crescent of flame in the air, and casting deep into the water under them a crimson glory that sank also down and down in my own heart, and illumined all its memories of beauty and delight. Behind these lamps rose the shadowy masses of church and palace; the moon stood bright and full in the heavens, the gondola drifted away to the northward; the islands of the lagoons seemed to rise and sink with the light palpitations of the waves like pictures on the undulating fields of banners; the stark rigging of a ship showed black against the sky; the Lido sank from sight upon the east, as if the shore had composed itself to sleep by the side of its beloved sea to the music of the surge that gently beat its sands; the yet leafless boughs of the trees above me stirred themselves together, and out of one of those trembling towers in the lagoons, one rich, full sob burst from the heart of a bell, too deeply stricken with the glory of the scene, and suffused the languid night with the murmur of luxurious, ineffable sadness.
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> "But there is a perfect democracy in the realm of the beautiful, and whatsoever pleases is equal to any

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[1] The Story of a Play (1898), p. 29.

> other thing there, no matter how low its origin or humble its composition; and the magnificence of that moonlight scene gave me no deeper joy than I won from the fine spectacle of an old man whom I saw burning coffee one night in the little court behind my lodgings, and whom I recollect now as one of the most interesting people I saw in my first days at Venice. All day long the air of that neighborhood had reeked with the odors of the fragrant berry, and all day long this patient old man--sage, let me call him--had turned the sheet-iron cylinder in which it was roasting over an open fire after the picturesque fashion of roasting coffee in Venice. Now that the night had fallen, and the stars shone down upon him, and the red of the flame luridly illumined him, he showed more grand and venerable than ever. Simple, abstract humanity, has its own grandeur in Italy; and it is not hard here for the artist to find the primitive types with which genius loves best to deal. As for this old man, he had the beard of a saint, and the dignity of a senator, harmonized with the squalor of a beggar, superior to which shone his abstract, unconscious grandeur of humanity. A vast and calm melancholy, which had nothing to do with burning coffee, dwelt in his aspect and attitude; and if he had been some dread supernatural agency, turning the wheel of fortune, and doing men, instead of coffee, brown, he could not have looked more sadly and wierdly impressive. When, presently, he rose from his seat, and lifted the cylinder from its place, and the clinging flames leaped after it, and he shook it, and a volume of luminous smoke enveloped him and glorified him--then I felt with secret anguish that he was beyond art, and turned sadly from the spectacle of that sublime and hopeless magnificence.[1]

I have presented these two night-pieces that the reader may judge for himself which challenges its author's art. The first is immeasurably the less characteristic, and, even for its early period in his development, has the nature of an indulgence. And this brings me to say, with regret, that Mr. Howells is so afraid of scene-painting that he has been known to apologize for a sunrise.[2] I confess to a fondness for The Pathfinder; but the question does not concern realism. It is an indubitable fact that the sun does sometimes rise in majesty. Nor must one love Man the less to insist

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[1] Venetian Life, pp. 33-36.

[2] Their Silver Wedding Journey (1899), p. 481.

that sometimes

"There is society, where none intrudes."

A trifle less humanity on Mr. Howells' part would have dispensed with the intrusion of the sexton's son at the graves of Shelley and Keats;[1] a little less interest in the pilgrims at San Sebastiano and he would have breathed the true atmosphere of that shrine.[2] The pilgrims are ubiquitous, but San Sebastiano is unique. It would be only fair, however, to match these two failures with places by two hundred triumphant successes with people. The elderly man who gave our travelers their information concerning "Cromwell's castle" is certainly such a success,[3] but the person I would have no one miss is the lady knitting who shared their compartment from Plymouth to Bristol[4]--both acquaintanceships recorded in the ever-delightful English Towns. I can think of nothing better than the visit to Petrarch's house at Arqua for a fine subordination of the transient human element to its proper function of enlivening a scene of integral permanent aspects.[5]

I am loath to leave these charming books, but my chapter has already violated its promised character of an intermezzo. The reader may recall my prefatory distinction that stylistically considered the two forms which it has treated are positively antipodal. And since the travels represent our author at the apogee of his verbal art, I cannot conclude without a word on the lavishly eulo-

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[1] Italian Journeys, pp. 166-8.

[2] Ibid., pp. 159-61.

[3] Certain Delightful English Towns, p. 10.

[4] Ibid., p. 42.

[5] Italian Journeys, pp. 216 ff.

gized Howells style.

Of tributes to this graceful and musical style there is no end; even those who deny its possessor ideas will go extreme lengths is praise of it. But now, all it is possible to say in this direction has been finally phrased by Mark Twain, whose essay on Howells, almost entirely devoted to manner, is far and away the best. His analysis of the Howells humor is something in which he speaks with authority.

"As concerns his humor, I will not try to say anything, yet I would try if I had the words that might approximately reach up to its high place. I do not think any one else can play with humorous fancies so gracefully and delicately and deliciously as he does, nor has so many to play with, nor can come so near making them look as if they were doing the playing themselves and he was not aware that they were at it. For they are unobtrusive, and quiet in their ways, and well conducted. His is a humor which flows softly all around about and over and through the mesh of the page, pervasive, refreshing, health-giving, and makes no more show and no more noise than does the circulation of the blood."[1]

He has nothing but praise for the easy-flowing rhythms which so vex Mrs. Atherton,[2] not realizing, I fear, how often they

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[1] "William Dean Howells." Harper's (1906), 113:223.

[2] "Mr. Howells, you know, denounces originality. He tells us to stick to the small things in fiction, to shun the big things. He has produced, and his followers maintain, a literary style that is all l's and n's and r's. It is the cultivation of a perfectly flat, even surface. It is afraid of rough surfaces, of mountain peaks and deep valleys."--Gertrude Atherton, "Why Have We not More Great Novelists?" Review of N. Y. Times interview in Current Literature (1908), 44:159. Cf. Gertrude Atherton, "Why is American Literature Bourgeois?" North American Review (1904), 178:771-81--a systematic arraignment of the "magazine school," for the inanities of

are antithetic to the compactness which he also praises. Professor Pitkin makes a very valuable suggestion concerning the noticeable psychological mannerism which inflates his style at times,[1] albeit a suggestion that does not lack its touch of humor when later on it is advised that students cultivate vividness, clarity, and dramatic velocity by rewriting a story of Mr. Howells', stripping it of verbiage. I should rather say: read De Maupassant as a sovereign antidote; but no doubt Mr. Pitkin gives that advice as well.

The only point on which Mark Twain goes dangerously wide of the target is in crediting his paragon with a solicitude for the inevitable phrase, a Frenchman's reverence for le mot juste. Now, whatever delight we may take in Mr. Howells' phrasal excellencies--and I, for one, take a keen delight in them--no fact could be clearer than that here we have to deal with no American Pater. I shall presently exhibit his heretical opinions on la vrai verité in the Flaubertian sense. The fact is that, very much as he has failed to disassociate the description of purely natural phenomena from scene-painting, he has failed to disassociate style from what is known in journalistic parlance as "fine writing." The nineteenth-century euphuism which promulgated the doctrine of le mot juste, welcomed by both aesthetes and realists, took an entirely dissimilar view of the matter. "Fine writing" attaches to the Elizabethan euphuism which ingeniously conceals thought, or tricks it out in fantastic vesture, its ideal being one of elegance; whereas the later euphuism, scien-

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which in Mrs. Atherton's belief Mr. Howells is largely responsible. While inadequate, like that of George Moore, since it takes no proper account of Mr. Howells' positive aims, the criticism of Mrs. Atherton is very salutary.

[1] Short Story Writing, N. Y., Macmillan, 1912, pp.117 ff.

tific, pseudo-scientific, if you will, postulates a unique essence for every idea, and strips the thought to its essence, its ideal being one of exactitude.

Mr. Howells in practice rises superbly superior to his convictions. He practises, as do all who arite well, the principle of Flaubert, but with infinitesimally less labor. He has observed no doubt that when he strives for style he misses it. Hence, he cautions others not to strive. So great is his facility in the easy, almost conversational manner, that, for him, strife does not connote any endeavor to préciser that manner; it connotes literosity rather. I think this is substantiated by the fact that when he does go out of his way to attain style, he is very apt to throw off some image that can be branded as "literose," that takes the eye off the object, as Wordsworth explained it in his strictures on Pope. This is "style," but it would have made Flaubert cringe with horror, to the delight, no doubt, of the refractory Zola: "The wheel of the steamer was as usual chewing the sea, and finding it unpalatable, and making vain efforts at expectoration."[1] Mr. Pitkin would have his students expunge the italicized clause from the following sentence. "The sunset struck its hard red light through the fringe of leafless trees to the westward, and gave their outlines that black definition which a French school of landscape saw a few years ago, and now seems to see no longer."[2] Mr. Pitkin objects quite properly that this clause, which appears to be "a sober historical allusion," is in reality "a private reminiscence," and as such is to be identified

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[1] Italian Journeys, p. 273.

[2] Short Story Writing, pp. 117-119.

with the psychological mannerism. My point is simply that, however it be classified, it is an evasion of the labor which a perfect stylist expends in search of le mot juste. It is a more pleasing evasion than the strained metaphor of the expectorating wheel, but an evasion none the less. One need not be hyperaesthetic to feel that the following description removes the mind's eye some thousands of miles from its object. "By and by they passed a fisherman drawing his nets, and bending from his boat, there near Albany, N. Y., in the picturesque immortal attitudes of Raphael's Galilean fisherman; and now a flush mounted the pale face of the east, and through the dewy coolness of the dawn there came, more to the sight than any other sense, a vague menace of heat."[1] It is possible that the author here wished to reflect the thoughts of his characters, rather than give his reader a pristine impression; if so, he was lax none the less, in not indicating that intention.

All this is not finding fault with Mr. Howells' way of saying things. It is clearly holding him up for the very highest standard of verbal artistry, and tacitly measuring him from the heights attained by virtuosi like Walter Pater, who took to heart the precept of Ruskin: "A book is written, not to multiply the voice merely, not to carry it merely, but to perpetuate it." Now, it is obvious that the perpetuation of the voice requires both a difference of intention and a longer patience than its multiplication. Robert W. Chambers was recently quoted in a newspaper interview as remarking that Flaubert was "slow;" and so he was, very slow indeed. Zola remonstrated with him. Henry James was not slow, but he had the difference of intention; he was consciously a stylist, like the

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[1] Their Wedding Journey (ed. 1899), p. 78.

style or not as you please. Edith Wharton has both the artistic intent and deliberation, though not the deliberation of a Pater. If the reader wishes to make the odious comparison, I suggest the dawning of spring in Italy as it challenged the pen of Henry James on his "Roman Rides,"[1] as exquisitely depicted in Mrs. Wharton's "March in Italy,"[2] and as Mr. Howells has scattered its sweetness through the last third of Tuscan Cities. I mistake much if he withhold the palm from Mrs. Wharton.

Mr. Howells' staggering output is sufficient warrant that he does not conceive art as a long patience. And I consider only his most finished work; I will not hold up against him such garrulous essays as "An Experience" in The Daughter of the Storage. We shall now inquire somewhat more closely into his intention, his theory of style.

His ideal of style in literature is consonant with his ideal of structure. Just as the form of the novel should be free and flexible, adaptable always to the exact transcription of ordinary events, so the manner of speech should be the ordinary manner of a clear and musical speaker. Since he would not have the form distorted or molded in accord with Stevenson's "one creative and controlling thought," to which every incident and character must contribute; he could not have the style pitched "in unison with this," as the romancer bids. The eternal vigilance against the word that "looks another way," the contriving of patterns and webs of discourse, which for Stevenson make writing a fine art, must appear to Mr. Howells of an artificiality only less dangerous than the contriving of plots.

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[1] Transatlantic Sketches, Bost., Houghton, ed.1893,pp.136-155.

[2] Italian Backgrounds, N.Y., Scribner's, 1905, pp. 127-152.

In boyhood, he played the sedulous ape as sedulously as did the Scot; he never loved an author, he tells us, without wishing to write in his manner. He could not admire even old Chaucer without borrowing Chaucer's archaic phrases. At one time he had a craze for the simple Anglo-Saxon words, despising most heartily all long Latin derivatives. "I still like the little word," he remarks, "if it says the thing I want to say as well as the big one, but I honor above all the word that says the thing."[1] "To aim at succinctness and brevity, merely, as some teach, is to practice a kind of quackery almost as offensive as the charlatanry of rhetoric. In either case the life goes out of the subject."

He came to learn that "style is only a man's way of saying a thing,"[2] and that although one may always learn from the masters, it is quite futile to practice talking in their various manners. His advice to the youthful contributor is to "put aside all anxiety about style; that is a thing that will take care of itself; it will be added unto him if he really has something to say."[2]

"If he has not much to say, or if he has nothing to say, perhaps he will try to say it in some other man's way, or to hide his own vacuity with rags of rhetoric and tags and fringes of manner borrowed from this author and that. He will fancy that in this disguise his work will be more literary, and that there is somehow a quality, a grace, imparted to it which will charm in spite of the inward hollowness. His vain hope would be pitiful if it were not so shameful, but it is destined to suffer defeat at the first glance of

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[1] My Literary Passions, p. 112.

[2] Literature and Life, p. 74.

the editorial eye.

"If he really has something to say, however, about something he knows and loves, he is in the best possible case to say it well. Still, from time to time he may advantageously call a halt, and consider whether he is saying the thing clearly and simply. If he has a good ear he will say it gracefully and musically; and I would by no means have him aim to say it barely or sparely. It is not so that people talk, who talk well, and literature is only the thought of the writer flowing from the pen instead of the tongue."[1]

Hence, Mr. Howells is convinced that we grossly overestimate the value of style as a permanent literary quality. He holds no author great or worthy of remembrance because of his manner of speech. Style he will have it is something that is added unto a writer, whether that writer be the youthful contributor, or Dante, or Shakespeare, or Tolstoi. The psychology of this (and his is a view of wide and easy currency at the present time) is not a whit more convincing than that of the extreme classicist, who looks to style as the prime preservative of literature against the corrosion of time, or of the extreme euphuist, who carries his doctrine of unique quality and inevitable word to a length which identifies manner with matter. No one, however, has adequately and finally philosophized the problem of style. That is the reason we have it always with us. Meanwhile, the practical truth lies as usual, between extremes; and a good counsel is that which would neither adjure the youthful contributor to squander his nights in quest of the inevitable word nor induce him to trust the efficacy of an occasional halt to "consider whether he is saying the thing clearly and simply." The results of the latter procedure are, we have seen, as evident in

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[1] Ibid., p. 74.

the writing of Mr. Howells as the results of Stevenson's method are evident in his writing.[1]

In conclusion, if Mark Twain was excessive to the point of falsity in crediting Mr. Howells with a reverence for le mot juste, he atoned nobly by himself capturing one of the inevitable words, in what is thus far the most felicitous characterization we have,--sustained. In any of the memorable records of his wanderings (and in his novels and tales as well) it may be noted how remarkably Mr. Howells' prose displays this quality. This quality it is which reveals in him the sincere and exquisite prosateur, even as the absence of the same token betrays the mediocre versifier. "I intrench myself," says Mark, "behind that protecting word. There are others who exhibit those great qualities as greatly as does he, but only by intervalled distributions of rich moonlight, with stretches of veiled and dimmer landscape between; whereas Howells's moon sails cloudless skies all night and all the nights."[2]

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[1] "And, on the other hand, how many do we continue to peruse and reperuse with pleasure whose only merit is elegance of texture? I am tempted to mention Cicero; and since Mr. Anthony Trollope is dead, I will. It is a poor diet for the mind, a very colorless and toothless 'criticism of life;' but we may enjoy the pleasure of a most intricate and dexterous pattern, every stitch a model at once of elegance and of good sense; and the two oranges, even if one of them be rotten, kept dancing with inimitable grace."--On Style in Literature.

[2] "William Dean Howells," Harper's Magazine (1906),113:221.

VI. HIS TRANSCRIPTS OF LIFE AT HOME

Despite Mr. Howells' versatility in attacking a wide variety of forms, which his astonishing output has made possible, literature has become for him almost synonymous with fiction. His theory, which makes but little of literature in other than the narrative style, is consonant with his practice in recognizing the novel as the type of types. Indeed, the production of novels has been the serious business of his literary life. Such being the case, it may appear an anomalous circumstance in his development that he should have approached the supreme genre with hesitancy and long delay. This circumstance in a development more precocious than retarded may even seem to support the hypothesis in which I have so often expressed disbelief--that Mr. Howells forced his talent in undertaking the realistic novel. Nevertheless, one cannot too often reassert that in the Howells novel as it is, we have the man as Nature planned him to be. That it was arrived at by devious wanderings in back-waters cannot obscure the fact that it was his inevitable goal. Furthermore, the long apprenticeship and the timidity in handling observable in its early examples, far from indicating a natural inaptitude, are evidences of his sincerity in method.

It is frequently said that no author writes a sound novel before he is forty; and Mr. Howells is of that distinguished company

whose sound instincts prevented them from writing any novels at all before hard upon the forties. Their Wedding Journey (1871) scarcely pretends to be a novel; it is not until his third essay in the form, A Foregone Conclusion (1874), written at the age of thirty-seven, that he attains novelistic stature even in intent, that he casts aside his unwillingness to leave the actual and embraces the imaginatively real; and despite such successfully sustained studies as that of Dr. Boynton in The Undiscovered Country (1880), it is not until A Modern Instance (1882), written at the age of forty-five, that he produces a work which may be pronounced great, which is sound enough to be judged without the necessity of counterbalancing qualities with defects.

All that was meant in speaking of his timidity of handling results from his reluctance to give wing to his imagination. His enamourment of the real, while thus delaying the development of his novel, had also this result, that it brought him to the form with the perfected style and cultivated faculty of observation which enabled him to succeed. Such a story as Their Wedding Journey would have failed dismally in the hands of an immature writer. Henry James, who underwent no such training, found himself when scarcely younger, which makes it instructive to note that his development, unlike that of Howells, was from an immature handling of the imaginatively bold to an artistic treatment of the normal. The older man, on the other hand, came to the writing of fiction with his ideals and methods comparatively fixed, and his was a deliberate and cautious advance from the commonplace and clearly verifiable towards the abnormal and more significant aspects of the normal.

Henry James, moreover, had not and never acquired a humanity capable of inspiring in him an affection for the commonplace. He and

his father before him were exiles in their native land, precisely because it was crude and common. Howells and his father before him were firmly rooted, making the crudeness and commonness gladly their portion because it was alive, human, and real. Howells felt the charm, the spell of the Old World, just as did James, but it never had the effect of making the New World in his eyes flat and profitless. Coming from the more primitive West, he found in what seemed to James the crudities of the East, particularly in the intellectual life of Boston and its environs, the gratification which James found in manorial England. Color and picturesqueness he found and has continued to find in all places where men dwell, since color and picturesqueness are not conditioned by architecture and costume, however delightful these things may be, but by an attitude of mind and heart in the observer. His early environment was wholly fortunate, since it was supplemented by cosmopolitan experience, in reinforcing an inherited temperament which made for an estimate of modern life comparatively free from illusion. It has helped make of him an interpreter of America, of American democracy, clear and exacting, if not joyously cleaving the heavenward spaces as Whitman aspired to do. This difference gives a final reason why Henry James could not have written Their Wedding Journey.

This story, if it can be called a story, shows how clearly the genesis of the Howells novel lies in the books of travel and those engaging miniatures of life at home collected under the title Suburban Sketches (1871). It is really a sketch on magnified dimensions, dimensions made possible by the fact that it is also a travel book. It is perfectly transitional, and therein lies its chief interest. We could not wish Mr. Howells to have repeated its type with any frequency; for the advantage of the novel over the sketch and the

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Montreal, and Quebec. Clever in portraiture, rich in historical flavor, and in kaleidoscopic description, with a classic bit of scene-painting at Niagara, the work has its most remarkable quality in the air of adventure investing the thousand little incidents of travel. This its life-essence, no reader can or need be argued into accepting. He should feel it a phenomenon--the roll of an express-train into the night; but if he does not, he will not be cajoled into doing so.

In the persons of the Marches, it is fair to assume, Mr. Howells has incarnated his idea of the normal male and female of our species. They appear again and again in his novels, advancing in years with their creator, receiving now and then a biographical touch, lovingly bestowed, but certainly sharing more in his irrepressible vitality than in his deepening wisdom. "But where," I hear the reader ask, "do you get a standard of normality?" In truth, the matter is sadly subjective. And it must be confessed that the Marches fail in the only convenient test that occurs to me. To represent faithfully the dull average of humanity, they ought to affect us more variously according to our moods. At rare and fortunate moments, our hearts surcharged with esteem for our fellow-men, we ought to spurn them contemptuously as libels on our kind; and then in harmful mood, rebellious at the simian antics of God's creatures, we ought to welcome them as at least a shade more wise than most. As it is, however, we do neither of these things. The Marches are fairly constant in their effect, and always a trifle below the level we reasonably expect people with their advantages to attain.

The variety they actually attain is two-fold. In the first place, although they arestatic characters to whom life has very

little to teach, they do grow old. They are mellowed in A Hazard of New Fortunes and Their Silver Wedding Journey. This, however, is not the main aspect. More striking is their susceptibility to the situation in which they may happen to be placed; their thought is tinctured by the mood of the dramatic moment. In other words, they are true spectators, which is wholly fortunate when it is artistically desirable to reinforce the atmosphere of a scene with its reaction upon sympathetic natures, but which is not so fortunate when foils are desired to throw its elements into relief. This might pass unnoted had not Mr. Howells used his Marches for the latter purpose so perfectly in A Pair of Patient Lovers (1901), where they play their parts with a detachment suggestive of Ben Jonson's comedy of humors. They maintain a sympathy with the principal characters, who are quite abnormal, unknown to the norms of Jonsonian comedy, but at the same time intensify and clarify the effect of the action. A dismal contrast is the Hawthornesque tale, The Shadow of a Dream, so fatally deficient in chiaroscuro, where our dear friends become positively morbid, as direly shadowed by the dream as any of the miserable company.

To depict the effect upon the Marches of advancing age is the motive for the additional chapter added to subsequent editions, "Niagara Revisited, Twelve Years after their Wedding Journey." Life has not used them ill; neither have they enjoyed too much prosperity. The parents of two children, they have in fact come to the practice of certain mean economies. Marriage for Isabel has not realized "the poetic dream of a perfect union that a girl imagines it.....It was a state of trial, of probation; it was an ordeal, not an ecstasy."[1]

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[1] Their Wedding Journey, p. 317.

Less depressing is Their Silver Wedding Journey (1899), the longest chronicle devoted exclusively to the Marches, where the theme of disillusionment is more lightly handled.

Basil, now the editor of Every Other Week, the rise of which journal furnishes the title A Hazard of New Fortunes (1889), takes a Sabbatical year on leave, which, counting time, is neither a Sabbatical year nor a silver wedding journey. With much ado, he persuades his eager consort, confirmed in the feminine wiles of contrariness, that they should renew the memories of their courtship abroad. The result is a complete travel book, augmented in volume and turned into novelistic form by the addition of a flirtatious love story, true to the Howells type, in which Mrs. March is given ample opportunity to practice her art as match-maker. Her skill in this art, hinted in Their Wedding Journey and exhaustively exhibited in subsequent volumes, we are led to believe, is like her contrariety and illogicality in being a natural endowment of woman, more or less incomprehensible to man. Mr. Howells has gained much of his credit for insight into the feminine heart by playing incessantly upon these three motives, together with the less gracious one of hysterics. A more finished, a less obtrusive, handling of these motives than is his custom, added to a nicely balanced wielding of the theme of age versus youth, which he exhausted in Indian Summer (1886) enlivens the sojourning and sight-seeing in Hamburg, Leipsic, Carlsbad, Weimar, and Berlin. Finally, Mrs. March decides they shall not go home. Then we are sure they are on their way.

The Marches share with many others of Mr. Howells's people their pleasing habit of walking in and out of his scene. Although he has never chosen to follow in the scientific fashion of Thackeray or Zola the fortunes of any single family, and has written but one bona

fide sequel, the Utopian romance, Through the Eye of the Needle, he is properly loath to relinquish the personages of his creation, right realistically permitting his reader to renew their acquaintance, or to catch unexpected glimpses of them here and there. This ingratiating practice imparts a convincing unity to his comédie humaine. Our casual meeting with Mr. Percy Bysshe Shelley Ray, the promising young novelist of The World of Chance, after five years, in The Story of a Play, is managed in a way to leave a brisk sense of the touch and go of actual affairs. The presence of the Hilarys in the latter book is an instance of the more thorough-going treatment which illuminates the history of a family. Ordinarily, however, there is no profound purpose in the resumption, but a gratification of our sense of familiarity with his world. Such is the effect when we take up the second novel, A Chance Acquaintance (1873), of our having caught a glimpse of its charming heroine, Kitty Ellison, in Their Wedding Journey.

While the travel interest gets the better of the first story, the imaginative eclipses the actual in the second, which is still descriptive of travel through the same region. To this work he brings a maturity in the development of theme and a deftness in the handling of plot, slight as the plot is, almost comparable to the finish of style and the keenness of observation noted in the earlier book. More remarkable even than the fact of his attaining these qualities at a single bound, is the evidence afforded of their utter nativeness to him. Since demonstrated, they appear inevitable. The dominant themes are not only heavily foreshadowed in Their Wedding Journey but are prophetic of his future writings. His concern with the affairs of the heart,. his general treatment of the love theme as well as his tricks of illuminating the feminine mind and contrasting

the sexes, his preoccupation with the question of social distinctions, and, above all, his sturdy nationalism, have been with him always very much as they are with him in A Chance Acquaintance. Primarily, however, the volume is a study of American aristocracy, the caste spirit in conflict with the leveling force of love.

Admirable as the story is told, it nevertheless falls short of transmitting the full artistic satisfaction of Pride and Prejudice. Notwithstanding the admiration in which Mark Twain held the novels of Mr. Howells and his declaration that a very good library could be started by leaving those of Jane Austen out, I am convinced that in more cases than I shall ever mention, whosoever succeeds in learning the secret of Jane Austen's greatness will at the same time have possessed himself of a key to Mr. Howells' shortcomings. Pride and Prejudice is great in an infinite variety of ways, but it will be sufficient to call attention to the fact that it realizes perfectly such cardinal tenets of realistic fiction as detachment in attitude, normality of personages and events, and inevitability of ending, although the last has been questioned. In using it as a measure for A Chance Acquaintance, I wish even more earnestly than I did in speaking of the Howells style, for a way to dissipate the odium that attaches to comparisons. Two things are clear: that Mr. Howells in transferring the problem to American soil and adapting it to American conditions, deals with aristocracy in an intrinsically less lovely manifestation, and in a manifestation, as others have noted, spasmodic, refractory, and less plastic to the artist's hand, no true aristocracy at all to the purpose of Henry James; and that Pride and Prejudice is not merely variously great but altogether of a high excellence below which it is not a defect so much as an inevitability to fall.

The matter of the author's attitude toward his characters, so far as it affects these two stories, is not structural but pervasive, determining the color and tone of the whole. Each attains impartiality and formal objectivity of manner, but the English work, for all that it lashes the presumptions and condescensions of aristocracy, is saturate with sunshine. Its shade is but the mottled glory of ancestral parks. Its author, though she clearly speaks through the lips of Elizabeth Bennet in that immortal scene which depicts the taking down of Lady Catharine de Burgh, is nevertheless as wholly superior to Elizabeth as to the irate lady. Mr. Howells, on the other hand, for all the wholesome fun he makes, has not that superb and unconscious aloofness which insures his way of telling the story against tincture from the emctions of his characters. It is not because he clothes trifles light as air in the trimmings of tragedy, that the most ordinary situation takes the caste of "inexorable fate," or "sinister chance," and dawns upon the participants with "paralyzing clearness;" it results rather from his sympathetic preoccupation with the perplexities of his people, not expressed but cumulatively felt. The danger of all elaborate "psychologizing" in fiction (Mr. Howells does not offend here as he does in such a later novel as Fennel and Rue) lies in muddling the color, not in disturbing the structure or altering the real import of the work.

Readers of Heroines of Fiction will recall Mr. Howells' high admiration for Jane Austen's skill in the utilization of trivial events, especially his just and amusing appreciation of the lifelike quality in Anne Eliot's rescue from the teasing clutches of two-year-old Walter in Persuasion. In A Chance Acquaintance it is true that he employs a more formidable device than a naughty little boy--a dog;

but his rescues usually have the true Austenian ring. The point of difference is again that he forces the note; his trivialities are insisted upon whereas Jane Austen never for a moment conveys the impression that hers are anything more than the trivialities they are. She continues to reap the reward of a superbly unconscious superiority to her material; while Mr. Howells seems to display his with an air of saying, "Behold, how delightfully insignificant!" much as a romancer might exclaim, "Behold, how sublime!"

The story in hand is set in motion by an exceedingly commonplace and lifelike accident of travel. Miss Kitty inadvertently takes the arm of Mr. Arbuton, the aristocratic protagonist; and the embarrassing episode which ensues is made very naturally to prepare the way to a delightful steamboat acquaintanceship. This acquaintanceship is brought to the stage of love with an expedition scarcely to be paralleled except in Out of the Question, for Mr. Howells' heroes and heroines have the most remarkable difficulties in deciding whether or not they are in love--a protest against the doctrine of love at fist sight. A quarrel too slight to be called a climax finally separates the ill-mated pair, but the nature of the whole action is to demonstrate that no more striking climax could be expected. The utter incompatibility of such a sweet, sincere, and democratic soul as Kitty Ellison with such a monster of inane insolence and condescension as Mr. Arbuton is demonstrated from a thousand angles, so that the ending, incidentally a protest against the romantic doctrine that love levels all barriers, is inevitable, just as the ending of Pride and Prejudice, which does not erect impassible barriers, is inevitable, Robertson to the contrary notwithstanding.

This reminds me that John M. Robertson, astute critic that he is, has allied himself with a numerous company of the injudicicus

in his cool assumption that A Chance Acquaintance ends "unhappily."[1] It makes one almost content with our absurd way of characterizing endings as "happy" or "unhappy" that the custom should provoke so delicious a bit of irony. The one jubilant note in the book is that which leaves us assured that Kitty, for all the tears it cost her, is really delivered from a snob too wretched in his egotism to be redeemed even by his love for her. Yet Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who was in a position to know, records the awful fact that Boston ladies awaited confidently a sequel which should settle matters more advantageously to the fortunes of Miles Arbuton.[2]

This dreadful commentary on the truthfulness of the characterization suggests that the inferiority of the book to Pride and Prejudice does not lies so clearly as first appears in the abnormality of its hero, but that a share of Mr. Howells' difficulty must be sought in the condition already mentioned, the stubborn nature of his materials. The task of the artist in molding to his purpose things intrinsically ugly, in catching their essential spirit wherein aesthetic gratification resides, in expressing this by nice juxtaposition and contrast, is facile compared with the handling of a subject merely vacuous. An idiot is picturesque and usually appealing, but an educated, travelled, and well-dressed man with no vestige of intelligence is next to impossible. The aggressive egoism of Silas Lapham and Sir Willoughby Patterne has an inherent fascination of which the utterly passive egoism of Miles Arbuton is quite devoid. Mr. Howells is of course prevented by the nature of his problem from crediting him with the blameless manners admired by the ladies, for

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[1] Essays Toward a Critical Method, p. 156.

[2] Short Studies of American Authors, p. 36.

the import of the action is that this blameless person in the sense that he would die rather than be in any way unconventional, is from the simply human viewpoint boorish and cruel. He does try for a point d'appui by leaving us to believe with the ladies that his creation is very handsome, but I for one cannot accept even this with conviction, and the illustrator, evidently brushed by the mantle of George Cruikshank, confirms me in my heresy. If nothing but a feeble character resulted, all might yet be well, but Mr. Arbuton has his worst effect in weakening what is the strongest feature of Pride and Prejudice--the love motivation. The conclusion of A Chance Acquaintance is inevitable, but the beginning of Jame Austen's novel is compulsory.

The romantic comedy Out of the Question (1877) purports to deal with the same problem of American aristocracy, but does so only after the fashion of stageland. In the interests of theatric effect, the conditions are reversed, the hero, Blake, being a poor but immaculate steamboat engineer, very importunate in the service of the aristocratic Mrs. Bellingham and her daughter Leslie, having been started in that direction by the exactions of Aunt Kate. The scene plays at the Ponkwasset Hotel, a country hostelry familiar to Mr. Howells' readers. In the adjacent woods, our hero rescues Miss Leslie from a couple of brigands, and, not content with that, pursues the ruffians and rends from them their booty, receiving in the encounter a broken wrist. His modesty, on all occasions nauseous, is ridiculous when, torn and bleeding, he pretends to have found the watch quite by accident. The zeal of his creator comes very near spoiling him as a stage hero, through an excessive exposition of his sublime qualities. His spiritual graces no doubt require some testimony from the other characters, but it is bad dramatic technique to

have them forever commenting on his handsome face and superb figure. The actor is hardly to be envied who has an entrance cued in this manner: "Hollo! That's Blake's voice, now.....I don't wonder it takes Leslie. It's the most sympathetic voice in the world."[1]

But that Blake's goodness and greatness should avail to win the hand of the fair Leslie is simply out of the question. Having once been a steamboat engineer, he can never be a "gentleman." Accordingly, Mr. Charles Bellingham, Leslie's brother, is summoned to give him his congé in a merciful manner. The superstructure of moving accident is about to be completed by the discovery that Blake, known to Mr. Charles of old, is revered by him as a paragon of all manly virtue, is bound and endeared to him as his savior from a watery death in the Mississippi, when suddenly the whole character of the play changes from romantic comedy to farce. It is impossible to regard the first part as burlesque, since it is perfectly consistent, and, moreover, the subject is definitely changed. With the swiftness of magic, the questions raised by the first part are dropped, and the subject is now the diplomacy of Mr. Charles Bellingham. The manner adopted is that of the one-act farces, but the air of probability which is preserved in the avowed farces is here cast to the winds. For this reason Out of the Question is hardly to be regarded as a complement to A Chance Acquaintance.

The only difficulty in explaining it as prentice work is that The Parlor Car (1876), an excellent specimen of short farce, preceded it; but this difficulty disappears on an examination of the second long comedy, A Counterfeit Presentment (1877), the second and last of Mr. Howells' flirtations with melodrama. A Counterfeit Pre-

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[1] Out of the Question: a Comedy, (1877), p. 153.

sentment enjoyed presentation with Lawrence Barrett in the leading role, and, parenthetically, it may interest theatre-goers of this generation to know that the version of Yorick's Love in which Barrett so often appeared was made for him by Mr. Howells from Un Drama Nueva by Estebanez. Happy indeed that Mr. Howells thereafter gratified his instinct for play-writing in the creation of his inimitable farces! These he turned out mostly for the use of Messrs. Harper at Christmas time, to appear later in the "Black and White Series," and finally to be collected in books as delightful as any from his pen. Evening Dress (1893) was reprinted from the Cosmopolitan, being, together with the romance, A Traveler from Altruria, and the story, A Parting and a Meeting, the souvenir of its author's brief editorial connection with that journal. In 1900, four came from the Riverside Press at Cambridge, namely, Room Forty-Five, Bride Roses: a Scene, The Smoking Car, and An Indian Giver: a Comedy. The others are included in the following list: The Sleeping Car (1883), The Register (1884), The Elevator (1885), The Garroters (1886), A Sea-Change; or Love's Stowaway: a Lyricated Farce (1888, Ticknor), the collections--The Mouse-Trap and Other Farces (1889) and The Sleeping Car and Other Farces (1890), The Albany Depot (1891), A Letter of Introduction (1892), The Unexpected Guests (1893), A Likely Story (1894), Five O'Clock Tea (1894), A Previous Engagement: Comedy (1897), and Parting Friends (1911). The presence of two of the best among the later ones lends the miscellany, The Daughter of the Storage its chief distinction.

In some of these little farces Mr. Howells has given us his most perfect work; they are like the sketches of travel in realizing completely the possibilities of a secondary genre. That they have appealed mostly to amateur actors is due altogether to their genre,

for they are anything but amateurish in execution. They are parlor plays *par excellence*, and have been played privately everywhere, even the advance sheets, according to the testimony of Mr. Alden, being in request before publication.[1] In England they have enjoyed a somewhat more public favor, *The Mouse Trap* having been twice played in London with an all-star cast which included Ellen Terry and Mrs. Kendall. Another aroused the enthusiasm of no more lenient a critic than Mr. Bernard Shaw, who recorded in his *Dramatic Opinions*: "The little piece showed, as might have been expected, that with three weeks practice the American movelist could write the heads off the poor bunglers to whom our managers generally appeal when they want a small bit of work to amuse the people who come at eight."[2]

One reason for Mr. Howells' success with the form may be sought in the fact that the farces represent him in a fairly complete though evanescent state of liberation from his Anglo-Saxon heritage. They form, in fact, his most intimate attachment to the French. There are few things more interesting to observe in his work than the disappearance of the sentimentality that surcharges the long comedies when the subtle psychologist goes out to play, unburdened of the necessity of making a drama, and content to treat manners in their amusing aspects with unlimited indulgence. Mr. Pattee in his chapter on Howells has attractively and in some detail drawn a comparison with Richardson which, in considering the farces, might very well be transferred to Richardson's great French contemporary, Marivaux. While we have in Mr. Howells no more the complicate intrigue of *Le Jeu de l'Amour et du Hasard* than the moral sentiment of *Clarissa*

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[1] J. Henry Harper: *The House of Harper* (1912), p. 320.

[2] *Dramatic Opinions*, v.1, p. 265.

Harlowe, we do have a closer alliance with the spirit of the French analyst. The delicate psychology of the feminine heart, especially in its vain and ineffectual effort to mask itself with words, and with its pride in the suppression of feelings which will not down, is handled with an infinitude of nuance. The motives are often if not prevailingly satiric, but no deep notes are struck. Lovers quarrel incessantly, their mutual esteem in no jeopardy. No passion enters the conflict, only moods and whims. Essentially social and humane, these pieces leave the larger humanity behind for a space, shut without drawing-room doors; and with the restricted aim and lightened mood, their author has his most signal success in his ever-obvious desire to make feminine absurdity charming. Their clearest analogue may be found in the Proverbes of Alfred de Musset, the most gifted nineteenth-century exponent of marivaudage. Ours are simpler and more fully blooded in theme and structure, but quite as rarified in psychology. Again, they are more realistic, preserving the world of Boston, never attaining the almost Arcadian, Watteau-like, summer-garden atmosphere, much less the moonlight fantasy which so often etherializes the theatre of De Musset; but the two are very like in preferring badinage to wit, and bird-like chatter to conversation.

The characters are all of the same social set, and the dramatis personae are fairly constant. Mr. and Mrs. Willis Campbell are omnipresent, the sublimated counterparts of Mr. and Mrs. Basil March. Mrs. Campbell is chief exponent of illogicality and contrariety, while her sister-in-law, Mrs. Roberts, specializes in exaggeration. Mr. Campbell, prime tease and trickster, usually sensible and witty, enjoying hugely the predicaments of others, except when, as in A Likely Story, he is forced to be one of the dupes himself, ordinar-

ily plays the norm. Mr. Edward Roberts, his brother-in-law, very absent-minded, candid, honest, and utterly unresourceful, makes a good gull. He habitually serves as a butt for the teasing of Mr. Willis, and is exhibited best perhaps in A Letter of Introduction and The Albany Depot. In general, the men of this elect circle are hardly more resourceful than the women, though less noisy. They are quite as helpless in The Elevator, when the arriving guests at Mrs. Roberts' apartments in the Hotel Bellingham get caught between floors, whereupon there is much ado, until the arrival of Mr. Willis Campbell, who suggests that since the elevator will not go up they start it down and walk up.

These little plays vary in merit, from comparatively bald studies in hysteria, like The Mouse Trap, based on the feminine fear of small rodents, a theme none too novel but seemingly of perennial appeal, to pieces of orient ivory like The Garroters. Some very few, like Five O'Clock Tea, have no complication, merely events. Some do not scorn the moving accident, A Likely Story deriving its mildly ironic title from the fact that complication and resolution rest upon an extremely improbable double accident; but in general a truly farcical complication is created entirely out of character. In the majority of cases we encounter nothing external, merely ludicrous self-deception; there is no mouse in The Mouse Trap, much less a footpad in The Garroters. The latter piece is, in fact, an extreme example of solicitude in reducing a supposed basis in coincidence to pure misunderstanding.

To return to the novels, A Foregone Conclusion (1875), the first novelistic fruit of his Venetian consulate, represents him in his initial attempt fully to realize the form, to touch deep springs of character, to give certain direction to the dramatic forces, and

to build as the architect builds. The result is a structure less like those Spanish tales of the picaresque which he is fond of holding up as models than he was again to attain for many years. To this end the descriptive element is subordinated and finely integrated, fulfilling only its noblest function of fixing and enriching the human scene. Except in a few passages, where he looses his hand, notably a lavish picture of Casa Vervain, the residence of his heroine, and a gorgeously colored description of a Corpus Christi procession, his purpose has been by discreet touches to give the sense of Venice by sunlight or candle-light. "Little miracles of observation," he has somewhere called them, which lend a salient touch of odor, sound, or color, the creak of an oar, or the breathing of the gondoliers. In clear characterization and artistic plotting it is the first of his books to suggest Turgeniev. This it does not merely in method, but to a certain degree in substance. Don Ippolito, for example, who as a matter of fact was drawn from life, his original being the priest with whom Mr. Howells read Dante, seems to have taken over something from the type of idealist who, with his fertile brain, and his vague but irrepressible longings, unpacks his heart with words through so many Russian novels. Although marred by a prolonged and tawdry ending, A Foregone Conclusion is altogether a vastly more profound and moving book, as well as a more shapely, than either of the antecedent ones.

Don Ippolito, strange, pathetic, and sinister figure of a priest fallen from the arms of the Church in that place and that day when a priest found his only refuge, his only consolation in the Church defies characterization in a word. Ferris, the United States consul, calls him a universal genius, another Da Vinci, yet is ever appalled by his child-like ignorance of the world. The pathos lies

in his ignorance of the fact that the double life under which he so sorely chafes bars him effectively from what he most needs--love and sympathy. Ferris, from whom we learn most of what we know about him, surmises this but hardly realizes it. The character is much too complex for Ferris's analysis. Don Ippolito longs for America, the inventor's Utopia, as artists long for Italy, and the circumstance of Civil War in America gives him an opportunity to approach Ferris with an ingenious model of cannon for use by the Union army. The acquaintanceship leads to his engagement by an American lady, Mrs. Vervain, as Italian teacher to her daughter Florida; Mrs. Vervain being led to believe that she has thus put an end to the annoyance suffered in the past of having tutors turn lovers. All things conspire to make the dawn of love in the poor priest's heart inevitable, if ever love dawned inevitably. Mr. Howells has seldom since handled a more complex situation, or one more serious for the persona involved, one depending so little upon mere convention. The inexorably delicate predeicament of Ferris in finding himself in love after being bound by Don Ippolito's confidence, is on the other hand, the typical situation for Howells lovers, being brought about solely by his own obtuseness and prolonged solely by his utter unresourcefulness. The obtuseness of Don Ippolito is powerfully clear to the reader but that of Ferris is merely given, a case which obtains with too many of Mr. Howells' conventional lovers. In both cases the situation grows out of character, but the character of the priest is susceptible of elucidation. He carries his origins in view, consequently his destiny stimulates the imagination. This is the more remarkable in that he is viewed almost exclusively through the eyes of the other parties to the complication. A figure of infinitely greater interest than the hero, he is consistently subordinated, which is not only disappoint-

ing but contributes to the mystery which shrouds him to the end.

The comparison of Ferris with his rival demonstrates how loose is the formula of "everything from character," and in like manner a comparison with Florida Vervain sheds a clear light upon the shibboleth of normality. Florida is no more abnormal than Ferris, yet our interest in the love story is almost confined to her part in it, and all because the author has made a real study of her. She has her dossier, as Don Ippolito has his, while Ferris gives us the impression of an improvisation. In the one case Mr. Howells is vindicating his principle that ordinary people can be made interesting; in the other he is asking us to be interested in a person just because he is commonplace. As a matter of fact, Ferris confirms us in the impression left by the Marches, that Mr. Howells' conception of normality is not flattering to our species. Florida, with no very striking superiority over her lover, does not inspire this reflection or at least not until the end, which indicates how her author has enlisted our interest by making clear how and why she is what she is. Unless this is done, the normality of fictional personages has no peculiar charm; it remains a negative virtue in character depiction, just as the derivation of action from character may yield the artist nothing more than consistency.

Florida is a made character, but beautifully and strongly make. She is studied by the method of contradictory traits. A certain hauteur, not to say arrogance, of her nature, for example, drives her to an excessive humility in her devotion to her mother, and later, we are told, to her children. Her fiery temper, a bequest, along with her tropical name, from her father, the late Colonel Vervain, seeks compensation in effusive remorse. She is strikingly contrasted with her mother, who is of the fragile, frank, and impulsive type, but

who has, nevertheless, a charm which frustrates the author is a seeming desire, which he would no doubt deny, to hold her up to ridicule. Florida's intense reserve is a chill wall against the brusqueries of Ferris, especially when they are directed at her mother. She is a ritualist in religion, but almost fierce in her scorn of hypocrisy and in her devotion to truth, which triples the barrier in the way of her understanding the priestly lover. The reaction of these two disparate and complex natures upon each other is the vital part of the novel. Unwittingly she touches the most dangerous chords, bringing him finally to the declaration that overwhelmes her with horror. It is impossible that she should not bruise him cruelly, but a flood of pity and remorse compels her at the parting moment to fling her arms about his neck and press his head against her heart.

Mr. Howells' next novel, Private Theatricals, which appeared in the Atlantic (November, 1875 to May, 1876), presents the simpler but more delicate problem of the misery left in the trail of a heartless coquette. Although by no means worthy of comparison with A Foregone Conclusion, it is regrettably absent from the present list of his works, containing as it does in Mrs. Farrell his only full length portrait of a true flirt. The work appeared in book form in Edinburgh, but was suppressed, for a reason which Mr. Pattee guessed with perfect accuracy. At least a writer for the Bookman, who signs himself "Ricus," claims to have first-hand information that the inhabitants of the little mountain resort where the scene is laid were altogether furious at the portraits of themselves which they found between the covers of the Atlantic, and threatened Mr. Howells with the law.[1] It may interest bibliophiles to know that the suppression

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[1] "A suppressed Novel of Mr. Howells." Bookman (1910), 32: 201.

of Niagara Revisited (1884) was for a different reason although the same might be surmised. The truth is, however, that that pamphlet was in its original form written and printed as railroad advertising matter, and the difficulties which led to the destruction of the edition were pecuniary.

Mr. Howells' reversion from the more serious artistry of A Foregone Conclusion to the earlier style is brought fully to pass in The Lady of the Aroostook (1879), the best known of his novels antecedent to A Modern Instance, and generally considered one of the most characteristic of his productions. It is still true that A Foregone Conclusion definitely inaugurates a second period in his work, but the periods are very scornful of chronology, and The Lady of the Aroostook, except that it is an "international" novel, carries on the spirit and tradition of Their Wedding Journey and A Chance Acquaintance. It is in the way toward a perfection of the early manner, but no more absurd judgment was ever committed to print than that of Harry Thurston Peck, which pronounces it "the most perfect story that American literature has yet produced."[1]

Its heroine, Lydia Blood, very far indeed from being as Mr. Peck has it "a second Marcia Hubbard, but with finer traits," is a New England edition of Kitty Ellison, having among other local attributes the New England conscience, a malady destined so direly to afflict some of Mr. Howells' later creations. Her function is identical with Kitty's, to represent the true gentility of democracy as opposed to the snobbery of a superficially Europeanized Boston society. The sharpest shot is delivered in having her originality and her fine instincts appreciated in a society with more conventions than it

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[1]The Personal Equation, p. 26.

could possibly know what to do with. This is typical of Mr. Howells' handling of the so-called international situation; which differs radically from that of Henry James in conceiving the situation in its dramatic rather than in its critical aspect. That is to say, he is concerned with mutual reactions; and so far from seeing in the conventions of a stable social organization something sacred, fixed, and immutable, he is impressed by the fact that Europeans themselves do not regard them so. It is a certain fact that intelligent Europeans are far more open-minded than Europeanized Americans. And if some of Mr. Howells' heroines do redound rather too much to the credit of America, they are at least as true as Daisy Miller.

Mr. Howells sought to have Lydia Blood prove herself a "lady" in a situation so unladylike as to harrow up the souls of Anglicized Bostonians. Accordingly, he gets her, after it has been arranged that she shall be sent to her aunt in Venice, aboard the freighter Aroostook, where it is discovered that she is the only woman on board, and is making the voyage with three men passengers, not to speak of the crew. It must be confessed that the situation is shorn somewhat of its horror for red-blooded readers by the previous introduction of Lydia's protector, the fatherly Captain Jenness, an incarnation of bluff courtesy, kindness, and loyalty, who has an old sea-dog's habit of saying grace at meals. If we are to judge by the conduct of the two gentlemen, Mr. Staniford and Mr. Dunham, however, the thing is passing bold. These exquisites are many days out before they recover from the shock. They give the matter a most exhaustive analysis, debating ways and means of keeping their fair fellow-passenger unconscious of the anomaly of her position, no very difficult matter it seems, and utterly unable to do the one possible thing--

accept the situation.

The story falls into three parts, geographical as well as structural, the New England village of Lydia's origin, which is inimitably done, the voyage, which is dull, and the international events which occur at Trieste and Venice, and which briskly refresh the reader after the tedium of the "Aroostook." The middle portion, which is padded by stenographic reports of Mr. Staniford's conversation with his friend, is hardly realistic. Gramophonic it may be, but its effect in the novel is microphonic, magnifying the trivialities and banalities of ordinary conversation to abnormal proportions. We understand that these gentlemen are asses, but as such they tax the imagination by their protracted gossip. Their interest in Lydia's gowns is excessively effeminate, and a mild provincialism in her speech causes them endless perturbation. The truly memorial description of South Bradfield which closes the story is done in no such fashion. I trust it was this portion, which Mr. Peck justly admires, that inspired him to re-read the book "a score of times." One voyage in company with Messrs. Staniford and Dunham is quite enough.

The book lives by virtue of its parts, of which the monumentally faithful study of South Bradfield is chief. We are given a wealth of factual detail concerning existence among the New England villagers, not only their habits of thought but minutiae such as their peculiar intonations in speech and their preference of Japan to China tea. This would go scattering were it not held together by a fine selection for emphasis of salient details, and were not the whole given a pictorial embodiment which defies obliteration. The parlor lamp of pea-green glass and red woollen wick which sheds its radiance from Miss Maria's centre-table has an unforgettable value,

and the wisest words uttered by Mr. Peck are his cry of wonder and delight at that lamp which "alone is a sufficient claim to immortality, for its glow, somehow or other, makes the whole life and aspect of South Bradfield perceptible at a glance."[1]

The outstanding weakness of the book, on the other hand, lies in its design, undiscriminatingly lauded by Mr. Peck. This weakness inheres not only is in the disproportion already noted but in the obviousness of its devices as well, the rescue of Hicks and the lost letter. Mr. Howells' absolute intolerance in his criticism of anything remotely resembling traditional machinery justifies us in being rigorously critical of his own work in this regard. He has even cast a reflection, the only one as I recall, upon the impeccable Jane, apropos of Louisa Musgrove's jumping from the sea-wall at Lyme Regis in Persuasion. Of course, he was hard put to it for something to redeem Staniford, but he should have known, after all he has said on the subject, that it could not be done by making him the hero of such an exploit as the rescue of Hicks, but only by making nobility inherent in his character. The knights-errant of Sir Walter, imbued as they are with the ideals of a vanished chivalry, do not commonly participate in adventurous episodes so unconvincing. The letter device could easily be strengthened if not removed from the category of accident by simply having the portier steal it for the stamps, after a manner far from rare among the race of hotel portiers. Mr. Howells was either uncommonly fortunate or uncommonly wise in that his Italian experience did not dictate this enhancement to the realism of his study. The heart-easing chapter descriptive of the wedding appears to be a conventional falling-off from the high courage displayed in

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[1] The Personal Equation, p. 28.

A Chance Acquaintance, but it must be conceded that Staniford is by no means so impossible a match as Mr. Arbuton. The "Aroostook" is conveniently laid up for repairs in order that Captain Jenness may attend the ceremony, and his cheery prophecy goes far toward fortifying the reader against the speculations of more discerning friends.

The Undiscovered Country (1880), reminiscent of The Blithedale Romance, in which Mr. Howells under the influence of Hawthorne falls into a mild and pretty strain of symbolism of a kind that he is wont studiously to avoid, brings to mind his curious critical judgment expressing no uncertain preference for that one among all Hawthorne's novels. I am not sure that when he came to write Heroines of Fiction it lay at all heavily upon his mind to justify that odd preference; but I do feel that the reader of those causeries must agree with me that they unwittingly exhibit the greatness of The Scarlet Letter. His exaggerated antipathy to symbolism explains his coldness toward The Marble Faun; and it is not difficult to understand why he should like least of all The House of the Seven Gables, hovering as it does between heaven and earth. Yet his dismissal of the latter book one might not be prepared for, since, not to mention the fact that Hawthorne has scarcely equalled its minute photography elsewhere, the symbolism is more firmly integrated than in The Marble Faun, that is, there is little so completely externalized as the faun's ears and Hilda's doves. But perhaps that is the very reason; the symbolism of The House of the Seven Gables simply cannot be evaded.

There are fancies in Mr. Howells' earlier books, it is true, which indicate a capacity for such indulgence as we find here. There is, for example, a rose in A Chance Acquaintance which one expects

momently to become a symbolic rose; and on the gray morning that closes Kitty's love drama the heavens are made to weep a fine autumnal rain in the garden of the Ursalines. More striking than anything elsewhere to be found in all his works, however, is the symbolic value which the dullest reader must attach to the inventions of the Venetian priest, Don Ippolito, in A Foregone Conclusion, foreshadowing as they do the final strife after the impossible which is to bring his tragic life to its close. The episode of his repairing the fountain may even be said to have no other than a symbolic value. In the present story, the spiritualist, Dr. Boynton, and his daughter Egeria have found refuge in a community of Shakers. Egeria, her nerves shattered by her experiences as her father's medium, succumbs to the rigors of the journey, a journey made very rigorous indeed by her father's utter helplessness in the world of railroads, and falls ill with a fever. Old Boynton, who has dedicated his child to the study of truth, and explains "I have seen her change from a creature of robust, terrestrial tendencies to a being of moods almost as etherial as those of the spirits with which it has been my struggle to associate her,"[1] awaits her return to health, eager to resume his experiments in his present favorable surroundings, free from the atmosphere of mercenary, professional mediumism. But as spring advances his hitherto faithful subject takes an earthy joy in the rich vitality of the season. The full tide of youth, so long repressed by her sense of duty to her father, comes surging back, and carries her beyond his influence. The exquisite complement to the episode is the autumnal decline of the old man, who never recovers from the blow. "'You see,'

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[1] The Undiscovered Country. (1880, ed. 1908) p. 180

he said, 'how they have tricked out my room for me?' and he indicated the boughs of colored leaves, varied with bunches of wild asters and tops of golden-rod, in which the Shakers had carried him the autumn. 'There isn't any healing in my leaves, as there was in the flowers which they brought Egeria this spring,' he added, with a slight sign, 'but there is sympathy--sympathy.'"[1]

The book has three important bearings upon its author's development as a novelist: It constitutes his first extended study in religious sectarianism, a subject of great interest to him; it inaugurated his delvings into the occult; and it represents the apotheosis of the Howells love story. Ford, the lover of Egeria, creates his story out of his own sheer stupidity, making a rival out of the innocent Hatch, who is guilty of nothing worse than a more effectual kindness to the Boyntons than his, a most unconvincing hallucination that persists until the actual engagement of Hatch to another is announced. While the most excessive thing of its kind that Mr. Howells has given us, it is readily forgiven on account of the finishing touch which it lends to the figure of Sister Francis.

In Sister Francis, the most exquisite vignette that ever adorned a novel, Mr. Howells has managed to say more beautifully and with finer articulation than he has elsewhere said it, all that anyone could say from the standpoint of simple and every-day humanity, upon the subject of celibacy in religious sects and orders. Mr. Howells, by virtue of inheritance and early training in sympathy and in tolerance of eccentric sectarianism, is eminently qualified to take this standpoint. In the The Day of Their Wedding (1895), he has given the comedy of the matter, in a lively chronicle of the adventures

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[1] The Undiscovered Country (1880, ed. 1908), p. 316.

of Althea Brown and Lorenzo Weaver, who attempt to give up the "angelic life" for the earthly order.

The volume in hand records his first skirmishing on the frontier of the undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler returns. This frontier, needless to say, remains unpenetrated in the novel of realism. Mr. Howells' enthusiasm is enlisted rather by the psychological problems involved; his interest lies in the effects induced in the minds of investigators of supernormal phenomena, not so much in the phenomena themselves. This being the case, it is not strictly true to say that as the years have rolled on he has become more and more skeptical with regard to them. What has clearly happened is that he has studied their reaction upon more and more sophisticated observers. The personnel of The Undiscovered Country is worlds apart from the intellectually veneered circle of Between the Dark and the Daylight. No greater disparity can be imagined than that which subsists between the boundless faith of the visionary whose portrait is drawn at full-length in The Undiscovered Country, and the chill worldliness of the little club of skeptics whose proceedings are sketched in the short stories. This fact invites a suspension of judgment on the question of Mr. Howells' personal beliefs; but it does give a unique valuew to Dr. Boynton among this class of his characters.

Dr. Boynton is a country physician who has lost friends and practice in his blind and passionate devotion to the occult. Sympathy, the sympathy of understanding, is the motive for his portrayal; his creator abstains cautiously from idealizing him. No attempt is make to repress the ironic humor or to gloss the unlovely aspects which must of necessity manifest themselves when a mortal makes the

hope of immortality the sole concern of his earthly existence. He becomes capable of reproaching himself for having in attending an injured child neglected the larger duty to the race. A clever stroke is that which makes him take the hat of a gentleman who is in séance for the recovery of lost property. He is sublimely impatient of all opposition to his theories, indulging in outbursts of flamboyant rhetoric, swiftly to be succeeded by moods of childlike repentance and reconciliation, as soon as a new theory is evolved in his poor busy brain. He is not withal a simple type of visionary; he is actually endowed not only with the race conscience but with a certain scientific attitude of mind, however amusing his claims to its possession may sound; and there is a pathetic inevitability in his construction of a new hypothesis out of the débris of his former theories--that spiritualism is not spiritualism at all, but "a grosser materialism than that which denies; a materialism that asserts and affirms, and appeals for proof to purely physical phenomena."[1] Finally, it is a true psychology that shows the vigor of his speculative power triumphant over the ruin of his life's hope, and permits him to die in "an enthusiasm for death."

This striking and pathetic figure, Mr. Howells' second venture with a bold and unusual type, exalts his study, making it in the fullest sense a document in human character, not a mere exposé. It has, however, the latter nature as well: by way of glaring contrast to the presence of Dr. Boynton and Egeria, and in order to reinforce the idyllic value of the life depicted among the Shakers, it opens sordidly enough, plunging us at once into the depths of mediumistic Boston, the Boston of Henry James' Bostonians. In this portion

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[1] The Undiscovered Country (ed. 1908), p. 307.

of the story we scent the note-book a trifle more decidedly than in the depictions of Shaker life, but the re-creation is not less masterly. Its somewhat Zolaistic and documentary order accrues no doubt from the more deliberate marshalling of types. Mr. Howells has here been under necessity of exhibiting in smaller compass a representative variety of charlatans and their habitues.

His interest in psychic problems has not waned. The Shadow of a Dream (1890) one of the episodes which entangle our friends the Marches, must be mentioned because it pursues the matter of dreams over onto the borderland of the speculative, although it has next to no value as a study of such a problem, being primarily concerned with morbid psychology. The crucial matter of divination is needlessly evaded. It is a pale and melancholy book, unrelieved by the light of normal intelligences, a light which the Marches should furnish, but which they do not. The subject himself seems no more sick of soul than all those who live after him in the shadow of his dream. In The Landlord at Lion's Head (1897), spiritism appears purely as a realistic accessory, proposing no problem, in the operations of Jackson Durgin and Whitwell with the planchette. Mr. Howells' late manner of treating the supernormal may be studied first in the three tales comprising the volume Questionable Shapes (1903), questionable, it should be understood, in the modern, not in the Shakespearian sense suggested by the title. They indicate a familiarity with the Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research. The sophisticated, not to say cynical, atmosphere into which we now emerge is by comparison with The Shadow of a Dream, altogether gay.

It is this lightened atmosphere which enables him in the first story of the volume to defy the dictum of ghost-tellers time

out of mind that love interest simply will not consort with the ghostly mood. What he has really given us is not a weird tale but a magazine comedy in His Apparition, apparition being the scientific term for ghost, cleverly evasive of the old but ever-thrilling connotation. The two others are serious studies. The Angel of the Lord deals with what is known to morbid psychology as "personification." The hero, haunted by a consciousness of mortality, secludes himself in his country home, where he revels in the English poets of the grave, his obsession being finally personified in the likeness of an angel of the Lord, come to deliver him. Though One Rose from the Dead, a study of telepathy and telepathic communication after death, is the most interesting of the group. We shall have occasion to refer to it again, since it relates to the stories of the normal through its peculiar doctrine of love.

In the volume Between the Dark and the Daylight (1907) are collected a number of later stories dealing with abnormal phases of consciousness. A Sleep and a Forgetting ingeniously gives a speculative turn to the trite theme of suspension of memory. "I was wondering," says Lanfear, "whether in some other possible life our consciousness would not be more independent of what we have been than it seems to be here." "I mean whether there shall not be something absolute in our existence, whether it shall not realize itself more in each experience of the moment, and not be always seeking to verify itself from the past." The Eidolons of Brooks Alford builds a pretty romance of the magazine variety upon the psychophysical phenomenon suggested by its title, by which images present in the mind of the hero are externated in his physical vision. A Memory that Worked Overtime is likewise suggested by its title, a humorous episode quite

possible indebted to the research of the late Hugo Münsterberg (On the Witness Stand). A Case of Metaphantasmia gives a farcical turn to the matter of dream transference, a subject richly documented by the Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, by having a nightmare communicated to a sleeping car full of passengers.

To return once more to the novels, Dr. Breen's Practice (1881), shows us the apotheosis of the New England conscience, that "grim aftercrop of Puritanism" he somewhere calls it, which flourishes so long after the blue law has perished. The phenomenon has fascinated Mr. Howells. He noted it in Lydia Blood, and the infection persists in a large number of very late characters, but Grace Breen is the encyclopedian creation who unites in herself all the morbid manifestations of a "hypochondria of the soul" which has outlived its religious phase and persists in the ethical condition. Grace has undertaken the medical profession with the sole idea of service, and plans to go to one of the great factory towns, there to begin practice among the operatives. Her plans are interfered with by her duty to a private patient, thrust upon her in the person of an old school friend, Mrs. Maynard, invalided and separated from her husband (it is not difficult to understand why). She represents perverse femininity in the most vicious form that Mr. Howells had imagined up to the time the novel was written. To this deadly combination is added the nagging of Grace's mother, Mrs. Breen. "She was an old lady, who had once kept a vigilant conscience for herself; but after making her life unhappy with it for some three-score years, she now applied it entirely to the exasperation and condemnation of others. She especially devoted it to fretting a New England girl's naturally morbid sense of duty in her daughter, and keeping it in the irritation of

perpetual self-question."[1]

The early portion of the book suffers from a gloom like that of the later Fennel and Rue (1908), though by no means so implacable in its analysis as that sinister study. It merely lacks the fine chiaroscuro to which Mr. Howells has habituated us. The lighter character of Mr. Libby is too inconsequent, lacks the weight necessary for relief. Even the first part, however, is immensely superior to Fennel and Rue by virtue of its motivation and its strongly limned characters, but above all in its earthiness. It is grey and neutral, but substantial, being given a mundane atmosphere through the modulated though sombre tones of beach and sea. Fennel and Rue is Henry James reduced to morbidity; but there is an exultant and savage note in Dr. Breen's Practice which is Charlotte Brontë having suffered a sea-change.

In this novel Mr. Howells is reticent with analysis, but utterly implacable in conjoining the forces which unite in their energy to keep this poor girl faithful to her false ideal. If there were but a drop of human sympathy and tenderness in the relation of Grace and her patient, if the sacrifice were ennobled by a love which could sometimes shake itself free from the clutch of duty, if a spark of gratitude could only flame steadily for a little space, it would not so wear the nerves. Mrs. Maynard, however, is incapable of anything but sparks; her métier is to exhibit feminine whims and vagaries. The peevishness of the patient, the withered conscience of the mother, the live and quivering conscience of Grace, stirred to redoubled action by the force of advanced ideas, all form a manifold that fairly grills the nerves. At last, like a shaft of sunlight, enters Dr. Mulbridge with his brutal declaration: "I'm not a doctor of divinity." He

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[1] Dr. Breen's Practice (1881), p. 13.

laughs her conscience to scorn, but counts upon it to win him her hand knowing that she cannot fulfill her life's plan alone. In the supreme struggle, however, love conquers duty. The conspiring forces overreach themselves, and the girl, in an intoxication of freedom, not only gives herself to the man she loves, but plans to go to Boston for a season of opera. But, alas, this orgy consummated, and the supreme aesthetic dissipation of a trip to Italy realized, she is a Puritan still, and her husband mercifully finds a way for her to turn her professional training to account in the service of his operatives' children. "At the end of the ends," comments her author, "she was a Puritan; belated, misdated, if the reader will, and cast upon good works for the consolation which the Puritans formerly found in a creed. Riches and ease were sinful to her, and somehow to be atoned for; and she had no real love for anything that was not of an immediate humane and spiritual effect."[1]

The consensus of reviewers finds in Dr. Breen's Practice an anti-feminist document, on account of its heroine's failure in a profession at a time when women were beginning to enter the professions. There is more evidence for regarding it as a satire on the medical profession in general. Likewise, An Imperative Duty (1891) was received as a discussion of the race problem, because its heroine, whose grandmother was a negress, marries a white man. It would be difficult to refute anyone who should insist upon a polemic intent in the earlier novel, but An Imperative Duty so clearly discourages such unwarranted divination that it may serve as a warning applicable to the case of its predecessor. The ending, in which Olney mar-

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[1] Ibid., p. 270.

ries Rhoda and takes her to Italy, where she passes for an Italian, universally pronounced a weak solution, is transparently intended to preclude raising the question at all. If offered as a solution the word "weak" would fail to describe it. The real question is whether Rhoda's aunt, Mrs. Meredith, another exemplar of the prodigious conconscience, is duty bound to reveal the secret which will bring tragedy into at least two lives. It is a more intense and scathing dramatic exposition than Dr. Breen's Practice of how the "Puritan civilization has carried the cult of the personal conscience into mere dutiolatry."[1] I do not know how critical obtuseness has rendered Mr. Howells ranker injustice than in accusing him of dealing flippantly with the race problem. Olney's joking is a pathetic effort to draw his wife out of her morbid self-probing and self-denunciation, for she had inherited too little from "the sunny-natured antetypes of her mother's race,"[2] too little of "the heaven-born cheerfulness with which it meets contumely and injustice."[2] He is not successful in combatting her sense of guilt, any more than love and Italy could infuse the joy of life apart from service and sacrifice into the Calvinized soul of Grace Breen. Of course, Mr. Howells' pity for the black people is infinite, imperiously dictated by his ever-present sense of humanity, but An Imperative Duty is not a brief for them, but is concerned only with the problem which its title states. The only sort of equality it demands for them is equality before their Maker, an ideal which its author finds more nearly realized in the Church of Rome than in any of the protestant denominations.

The same passion for pointing a moral of easy applicability

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[1] An Imperative Duty (1891), p. 132.

[2] Ibid. p. 149.

in works inspired simply by a broad humanity has discovered A Woman's Reason (1883) to be an educational tract, a book for all rich girls to read and take to heart against the time when their papas must die insolvent and leave them to battle alone against a cruel and sordid world which would deny them bread. The fact is that Helen Harkness, had she been given the advantage of a business and industrail education, would nevertheless have been at an insuperable disadvantage in the economic struggle, for she too has the demoniacal conscience. She had also her quota of that New England stubbornness of will with which Mrs. Wilkins-Freeman so freely endows her provincial characters. This trait is a breeder of woes more prolific for Helen than the conscience, but worse than either is her native shallowness and general incompetency to cope with any situation. Furthermore, her lover, Robert Fenton, who might have brought her to her senses, is, impossible though it may seem, more incompetent than she, which calls to mind sundry observations of Balzac on the difficulties of demonstrating anything from the conduct of shallow persons. In fact, the spectacle of Miss Harkness among the bread-winners argues more feebly than the frank and simple caricature of the pampered daughter of society delivered in the person of Muriel, the heroine of A Sea-Change. No sort of education, in short, is potent to produce a Helen Harkness.

Her sad story, which is a doubled in length by the accident of a ship's breaking its shaft, is made possible at all only by Fenton's folly in taking her at her word when she says she cannot be his, whereupon he secures a post in China, through exchange with a brother officer. Even then, Mrs. Butler "felt that all Helen need really do was to go to Europe with her, and return to marry Robert

Fenton as soon as he could get leave to come home;"[1] and one reader at least is so devoid of the finer sensibilities as to agree most heartily with this dear friend. Instead, the interim is passed in futile attmepts at financial independence, the finer sensibilities dictating that she give away what little money she has.

In this case of her giving up her entire estate of five thousand dollars against the vehement advice of her lawyer, we are left to understand that there actually was fraud in the auction by which it was saved to her, the selling price of her father's property being run up by fictitious bids. But the facts in the case were unknown to Helen in her quixotic determination, so we can applaud, if we care to applaud, only the triumph of feminine divination.

The most unconvincing episode is her endeavor to make a living by ceramics, an episode which surely overleaps its author's purpose, posing this exemplar of fine sensibilities in a hopelessly vulgar light. To take her painted vases to a jeweler's shop, she must needs ride in a carriage; and, finding that she is known to the dealer, she is utterly unable to explain what she wants done with her wares, but makes an ignominious flight. She finally succeeds in leaving them at another shop. She actually survives the shame of seeing her work exposed to the public for sale. But then comes the catastrophe, the last ignominy to which she helplessly succumbs. Some of the vases are sold. Now, even were one willing to take it on trust that a "lady" would be outraged on learning that some one had purchased her vases painted for that purpose, what stretch of imagination could picture her venting her wrath upon the innocent shop keeper, or indignantly demanding of the purchaser the motive for his insolence? These scenes betray a heroine shockingly low-bred.

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[1] A Woman's Reason (1883), p. 170

A summary of such a characteristic portion of A Woman's Reason can indicate only the absurdity of any pretension it might make to reality; it cannot indicate the obfuscation of the author's point of view in telling the story, which is the really fatal thing. Were it not for this the narrative might stand as a capital burlesque of those familiar tales of the noble poor, Octave Feuillet's Roman d'un Jeune Homme Pauvre, for example. The satiric note is struck again and again, as in Helen's romantic notion of being in humble circumstances when Robert comes to claim her: "Don't you see? I must be here, and I must be wretched, to be perfectly true to him."[1] Try any such interpretation, however, and you will meet the author coming to browbeat you into accepting the seriousness of his situation. "She saw the reasonableness of pain," he will explain, "that to a coarser sense would only have been ludicrous."[2] I have already declared my coarseness, but fortunately there is no particular necessity for an examination of the author's comment. The whole matter is betrayed objectively, so little has this much over-mooted question of the author's comment to do with any event. To imagine that Helen Harkness could live and have the effect she does have on the other characters is ludicrous. That is a technically objective circumstance, really as subjective as anything else, which confirms the suspicion that the author's attitude is not detached but elusive.

But Helen's story is only the half. The agonies of Fenton, who after the separation is attacked by a malignant nostalgia and love-sickness, might have been copied out of some mediaeval adapta-

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[1] A Woman's Reason (1882), p. 212.

[2] Ibid., p. 205.

tion of Ovid, except that the heroes of courtly romance invariably know better how to treat their malady. He furiously resents all attempts to send him home, but the poor doctor, who is treated worse than the purchaser of Helen's vases, finally has him ordered back with dispatches. The doctor's relief, however, is not shared by the reader. Fearful adventures are brought to pass on coral islands, among man-eating sharks and what not; which prolong indefinitely the separation of the lovers.

This portion of the novel, though very tedious, warrants careful scrutiny by students of the narrative art, for it exhibits a curious technical perversion scarcely to be encountered elsewhere in so perverse a form. Instead of aiming to induce that "voluntary suspension of disbelief" which Coleridge fixed upon as the desideratum in dealing poetically with the supernatural, and which all skilful romancers like Marion Crawford and Robert Louis Stevenson secure in dealing fictionally with the improbable, Mr. Howells has undertaken to inspire conviction by forestalling his reader in pointing out the wild impossibility of his events, seeming to point with pride to his realism in dissipating the spirit and aroma of adventure. The motive will at first blush strike the reader as either amateurishly apologetic or satiric, but he will finally come to view the author in the naïve attitude of assuring him that, whereas such things have hitherto happened only in cheap romances, here, strange to say, we have them occuring in actual fact.

This curious literary self-consciousness, I am sorry to say, is not a sporadic manifestation in Mr. Howells' art; but, oddly as it consorts with an art so fine, it will be found, though in less distressing form, pervasive. How carefully he calls our attention to the "series of trivial chances" employed in contriving Helen's story-

"those chances of real life which one must hesitate to record because they have so much the air of having been contrived!"[1] These apologetic remarks, often harmless enough, are sometimes very destructive of the realism they are intended to preserve. From the already fragile fabric of A Woman's Reason they tear away the last shred of verisimilitude.

Likewise, the coincidences which call them forth are sometimes natural and amusing, but often disastrously unreal. The special Providence, as Jessie Butler declares it, which arranges that Helen shall meet Lord Rainford, her noble suitor, at Mrs. Wilson's, after being hurried there to avoid him, is well engineered, for example; but there is a distressing insincerity about the "trivial chance" by which Margaret's husband is blown up at the glass works. He was a coarse fellow, with whom I seek no alliance in vaunting my own coarseness. He objected in coarse terms to Helen's coming in and breaking up his home; but his taking off was not in punishment for this, as the reader is left to suppose, but solely to permit Margaret to resume her duties as Helen's housekeeper without the indecorum of a quarrel. Robert is at hand; the Fenton home would not be complete without Margaret, and nothing must be suffered to mar the happiness in which the long tale draws to a close. We do not here detect that solicitude for the happiness of laboring men which is shortly to loom so large in Mr. Howells' work.

It is a solemn fact that this tawdry piece of claptrap, "nefarious art," as John M. Robertson brands it,[2] and the word is not too strong, was permitted immediately to follow the strong and sincere novel, A Modern Instance (1882), and it in turn was followed by

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[1] A Woman's Reason (1883), p. 453.

[2] Essays Toward a Critical Method, pp. 192 ff.

The Rise of Silas Lapham (1885), one of the very highest reaches of Mr. Howells' art. The appearance of A Fearful Responsibility (1881) immediately before A Modern Instance is less appalling, but indicates that he was taking his responsibilities as an artist very lightly.

The invalid professor in this story, Owen Elmore, who goes abroad during the Civil War to work on what is referred to as a national enterprise, since so many Americans projected it--a history of Venice, has neither the brains nor the spine to bear a responsibility. His capability is limited to futile self-torture. The responsibility is, nevertheless, foisted upon him in the person of a young sister of one of his wife's friends, and the international drama begins, a drama only by virtue of the imbecility of its actors. What fills the soul of the professor with trembling and dismay is the prospect of Miss Mayhew's making acquaintances in an unconventional manner, not his real duty to investigate and appraise the worth of the young Austrian officer whose acquaintance she does make. Horror of the unconventional situation paralyzes him, precluding all the useful efforts that a sane and normal man might make in behalf of his charge. His brutal dismissal of Von Ehrhardt, whose letter enclosing the proposal of marriage he acknowledges "touchingly brave and fine,"[1] causes him poignant remorse later, but that helps to the story not at all, serving only to tenuate the maudlin ending.

It is a double pity that Von Ehrhardt is dismissed by the author as well as by his crazy hero, for he offers the only possibility of strengthening the story, and furthermore makes fair promise of becoming one of the most valuable and original contributions to the foreign sketches, a complement to the trifling officers drawn in

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[1] A Fearful Responsibility (1881), p. 78.

The Lady of the Aroostook and Indian Summer. Even as it is, the pathos of the young man, merely suggested for the readers speculation, is the only pathos capable of "infecting" the reader (the first Tolstoian requisite), who must feel that his acquaintance would outvalue that of a wilderness of Elmores. The pages of Tolstoi and Turgeniev will be searched in vain for any such abuse of the realistic principle of all from character, which cannot be interpreted to mean that no objective situation is necessary. Mr. Howells can so interpret and apply it only by reducing the characters to idiocy, so that they make tragedy out of any situation whatever. This has the disadvantage noted by Balzac, that their antics prove nothing. In A Fearful Responsibility, Mr. Howells suppresses with a deliberate hand, blinded to the more vital considerations of realism in his worship of dogma, the one character in the situation who could prove something.

If anything further were needful to rob the story of significance and muddle it completely, it would be to rob the idiots of their self-created situation. This is thoroughly accomplished by the author's exegesis, which in a vague and undirected effort to patch things up, presently begins to hint that Elmore's regrets were unfounded, and that Lily, after all her agonies, did not care so very much. We would rather see all this in a completed action, but we are almost congratulated on our ignorance of the facts, which seems to justify such pleasant surmises. It finally appears that the only person whom the story could possibly concern is Elmore, who would have made a tragedy of life under any circumstances.

> "He could not at once realize that the tragedy of this romance, such as it was, remained to him alone, except perhaps as Ehrhardt shared it. With him, indeed, Elmore still sought to fret his remorse and keep it poignant, and his final failure to do so made him ashamed.

> But what lasting sorrow can one have from the disappointment of a man whom one has never seen? If Lily could console herself, it seemed probable that Ehrhardt too had 'got along.'"[1]

This is none too illuminating, surely, but it does console us with the knowledge that Elmore is no wiser than we as to what the affair is all about. John M. Robertson in pointing out an egregious example of carelessness in structure, leads us to infer that the author did not know either. Mr. Robertson also gives his word as an Englishman that English society furnishes nothing to warrant such insanity on the subject of social convention. It is assuredly not typical of America, even granting that American aristocracy is more hide-bound than European. It must be concluded, therefore, that A Fearful Responsibility is deficient in value both as a work of art and as an international study.

The reader may pertinently ask what has befallen Mr. Howells with his shibboleth of objectivity and detachment. And it must be answered that, though his notion of this quality is sometimes queer, to say the least, he has not flagged in his strife to attain it. His methods, however, are often such as defeat their own end. Thus, the suppression of fact which necessitiates the descent to bald exegesis in A Fearful Responsibility, is presumably in the interest of detachment, to convey a strikingly veracious impression of life's incertitude for the casual observer. The death of Mrs. Meredith in An Imperative Duty is a comparatively successful instance, but aloofness is hardly worth while for aloofness' sake. We are too often invited to take delight in situations not "subject to interpretation," as Henry James liked them, but subject merely to pointless guessing. An obscure situation may be nothing but a conundrum. It is not so that certain French masters who have made a fetich of ob-

[1] Ibid., p. 163.

jectivity dispose their materials. How artfully de Maupassant contrives that nothing shall be withheld, and that what is given shall have its full effect! De Maupassant, for example, without injustice to the merits of Owen Elmore, would have raised hilarious laughter at his being recalled to America to become the head of a military college. Mr. Howells, though straining after verity, is in fact too deeply engrossed with his poor professor's qualms and fears to appreciate the awfulness of the joke. Detachment is neither to be lost nor won by easy devices, but is the inevitable result of an author's superiority to his material.

To measure the injustice which Mr. Howells has done himself in permitting such aberrations as A Woman's Reason and A Fearful Responsibility to survive it is unnecessary to turn to the more ambitious works, A Modern Instance and The Rise of Silas Lapham, which will be treated in the next chapter. In Indian Summer (1886) he achieved one of his most gratifying successes in making commonplace people and commonplace events profoundly interesting. I cannot follow my favorite commentator, Mr. Robertson, in his dissatisfaction with this book, for he approaches it unsympathetically. It must be conceded him that Colville and the two women are not average Americans, but their types are common enough; and though I can understand the point of view from which the ending in which the fat Adonis of forty is "severed from the too initiative young woman and saved to the too obstructive widow"[1] might appear "so merely childish as to move derision,"[1] I am unable to forget that this ending was begun on the first page of the novel.

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[1] Essays Toward a Critical Method, p. 115.

In his attitude toward the personages of the story, Mr. Howells is happy throughout, signally so in the case of the romantic young lady, Imogene Grahame. Imogene is a veritable triumph of the author over himself, so commonly does he lose his balance in drawing romantic young ladies, leaving us with dark suspicions that the sentimental notions are not monopolized by them. I would not keep the reader in mind of Helen Harkness, but she is the worst cast in point. To Imogene on the contrary, he is quite superior. On occasion he takes the pains to employ a band of German students to illuminate her, quite objectively and from a fresh angle. Such equipoise betrays the hand of Silas Lapham's creator and prophesies the cunning art of The Son of Royal Langbrith and The Leatherwood God.

The principal characters are not precisely pleasant people, certainly not sensible people. I trust my strictures on the foregoing novels have not been construed as demanding that, for I grant Mr. Howells his chosen field of the trivial with all my heart. But they are not idiots, hence, though their situation is essentially of their own making, they prove something. They illustrate life in a selective phase, a highly selective phase perhaps beyond or beneath the reach of a more pretentious art. Certainly the problem of love between persons of disparate ages is embellished with subtler shades of thought and feeling than Turgeniev had opportunity to display in his serious treatment of the theme. And I think of no one who in a novel has elaborated with such a wealth of exquisite nuance, and with so keen an eye for its humorous and whimsical as well as its pathetic aspects, the emotion voiced with divine despair in Tennyson's immortal lyric, "Tears, Idle Tears."

Theodore Colville is no hero, but it is easy to understand

why he bacame a successful Indiana journalist while, only a godlike imagination could figure Owen Elmore at the head of a military college or Robert Fenton as a naval officer. Colville has just crossed the meridian of forty, when political reverses and freedom from professional duties turn him toward Europe and youthful dreams of architecture. Age, he discovers, has brought in its disillusionments--and he has not yet lived. He suffers a cosmic incompatibility, more acutely than James' Christopher Newman, and even as Christopher, he makes a desperate, sometimes despairing effort to play the flaneur. He achieves a very complex, a fatal state of mind and heart in which to meet Imogene Grahame, so beautiful, so susceptible, so keenly interested in his emotional history, so eager to sacrifice herself for some noble ideal. This follows a chance encounter with his old acquaintance Mrs. Bowen on the Ponte Vecchio. Mrs. Bowen, a charming widow, until we know her better, just in the bloom of maturity, is placed in a delicate situation by her responsibility as Imogene's protectress. The devious course by which Imogene's sacrifice is averted to her advantage must be followed leisurely to be enjoyed.

Mr. Howells has done nothing more enjoyable in his lighter vein, combining as this story does the salient features of the international novel, the love romance, and the conscience story, without excess, over-emphasis, or disproportion. Colville is somewhat obtuse, as must be, but he does not share the monumental stupidity of Ford, the lover in The Undiscovered Country. He proves his courage in an accident, which, however, is free from the heroics of The Lady of the Aroostook. And he champions the social institutions of American democracy wisely if not so well as certain earlier and later compatriots. In the picturesque quality of its Florentine setting the

novel does not fall below the high excellence to which Mr. Howells has habituated us, though this feature is accomplished less ornately than the Venetian background against which A Foregone Conclusion plays. Indian Summer is, in a word, a sublimated synthesis of the elements that define the so-called early manner, though that manner be a scant respecter of chronology.

The novels immediately succeeding Indian Summer mark Mr. Howells' return in deadly earnest to his researches in morbid conscientiousness. In The Minister's Charge; or the Apprenticeship of Lemuel Barker (1887) we encounter the dawn of Tolstoian humanitarianism, but a dark and cheerless dawn, scarcely distinguishable from the sullen twilight of Puritanism. It is the precursor of the sociological novels, avowedly Tolstoian, which begin with Annie Kilburn (1888); but these will be spoken of in a later chapter. Meanwhile, in April Hopes (1888), he turned off a love story in more playful mood, but impregnated by the two themes then engrossing him, contemporary Puritanism and social democracy.

In regard to April Hopes, I must again dissent from the opinion of Mr. Robertson, who finds the story "almost a complete success, so thoroughly is its particular motive within the author's scope,"[1] precisely my reason for preferring Indian Summer. The two are indeed alike in being comprehensively characteristic, but in the later book the elements are in no such just equipoise. The conscience motive, in particular, is overworked for a story calculated, as we may presume it is, to demonstrate

"how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day."

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[1] Essays Toward a Critical Method, p. 116.

This special problem intrudes, detracting from the main proposition more seriously than the other. The weather encountered is conspicously lacking in glory.

Gloriously to show forth the infection of love demands a heroine of more wholesome normality than Alice Pasmer, who, one must agree with Miss Anderson, is, if not positively morbid, something very like it.

> "I think she's moybid, Alice is. She in isn't moybid in the usual sense of the woyd, but she expects more of herself and of the woyld generally than anybody's to get out of it."[1]

Alice is a pastiche of Turgeniev's Liza, who has lent her lovliness to so many of the Howells girls, but she suffers by being put through some of Liza's emotional experiences without the visible situation to call them forth. She contemplates taking the veil ridiculously early. The story opens with a leisurely description of a Harvard class day, where Alice has been reminded she is sure to meet her fate, a consumation requiring five hundred pages or something less of misgivings, disagreements, and reconciliations, and after which the curtain falls on a Jane Austenian note, presaging storms ahead, but hardly resonant enough. We groan for them.

The love story, however, is constantly enlivened by sketches of the Boston aristocracy, introducing the Coreys and the Bellinghams, known of old. Harvard men may like the college color even less than that in The Landlord at Lion's Head, since a more deliberately destructive touch is brought to bear upon the vaunted democracy and fellowship of student life. The thesis, which seems ably defended, is that the world has little to teach them of worldliness and snobbery. But Mrs. Pasmer, Alice's mother, is the chef-d'oeuvre of aris-

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[1] April Hopes (1888), p. 90.

tocratic portraiture, mistress of all the ridiculous social arts of feigned unconsciousness, simulated surprises, and persistent fibbing. None can approach her excellence in accenting those most damning words in the parlance of the elect: "We don't know anything about them."

One of the most delightful of these lighter transcripts of manners is The Coast of Bohemia (1893), in which Mr. Howells turns, after the severer sociological studies of Annie Kilburn (1888), A Hazard of New Fortunes (1889), The Quality of Mercy (1892), and The World of Chance (1893), to the artistic world of the metropolis or rather to the fringes of that world, for his theme. All the old problems are with us in a fresh atmosphere and informed by the presence of a very grateful motive, not new actually of course, but new in its pervasive effect upon the story, the variegated follies of the artistic temperament. The ostensible heroine, Cornelia Saunders, an inveterate self-analyst, and a second Helen Harkness in pride, tries in vain to ruin the story and make it only a less impossible version of A Woman's Reason. In this attempt she is frustrated by the presence of her foil, Charmian Maybough.

It was a structural masterstroke to make Charmian, the chief sufferer with the disease, the artistic temperament, at the same time the one fundamentally well-balanced and clear-sighted character in the novel. Charmian's favorite maxim is that art is all one, in accordance with which she makes up her deficiencies in drawing by leading the artistic life, that is, so far as her step-mother, who is passionately devoted to the conventions, will allow her. Her innate common-sense, which Mr. Howells conceals from the reader as carefully as she conceals it from herself, restrains her from dis-

rupting the family peace, so that she lives her double life of respectability and art in serene complacency. Giving up her mother as a hopeless slave to society, she revels in martyrdom, and cleverly arranges her studio in their apartments with a low-hung canvass ceiling to simulate poverty. Here she finds an exquisite freedom from the "unreality" of the life to which she must return as part of the bargain, and makes heroic efforts to learn to smoke cigarettes. From this vantage point she wafts her breezy comments on the social customs of her mother's kind. "And my one luxury is going home alone," she confesses on one occasion, "Mamma doesn't allow it, except to and from the Synthesis. Then I'm an art student and perfectly safe. If I were a young lady my life wouldn't be worth anything."[1] The foolish tragedy of Cornelia supplies her an orgy of romance. The significant thing about her participation, however, is that when the affair has become too preposterous even for her to maintain an ecstasy in it, she is the only one who realizes that the thing has been played out. Charmian is the clou of the book; though she is offered as a fantastic creation, it is really the normal substratum upon which her eccentricity is built that restrains the aberrant natures surrounding her from lapsing into vapidity.

Ragged Lady (1899), in which the international theme is resumed, continues the love and conscience problem, but has no such savior as Charmian Maybough. It proves to him who reads Mr. Howells' novels consecutively that the possibilities of morbid conscientiousness are exhaustless, but the same can hardly be said for one's interest in the problem. So that, despite the unusual charm offered in matter of detail, one is left longing for the society of normal people.

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[1] The Coast of Bohemia (1893), p. 164.

Accordingly, it is a relief to turn to The Kentons (1902), the chronicle of an Ohio family in flight over two continents, in the attempt to save their daughter from an unfortunate love affair.

This main plan is indicative of its development, which might seem to reduce to absurdity the proposition that American parents are helpless and afraid before their children. It is hardly fair to criticise the work on this point, however, since the marvels of American parenthood are in fact beyond belief. The international situation is employed, but yields rather less trenchant comment than one expects, from taking into account the fact that the Kenton girls are less qualified to bring Europe to its knees than the Lydia Bloods and Clementina Claxons of Mr. Howells' imagination. A neat point is scored when the amiable Dutch lady remarks to Mrs. Kenton, having observed the actions of Miss Ellen, that her daughter has not been long married.

The fact is, however, that Miss Ellen is the weak point of the book. There is too much Clementina Claxon in her for the Middle West. A typical maiden of the tearful and conscience-striken type, who ends by accusing herself of "a certain essential levity of nature", she has no dramatic possibilities comparable to those of her slangy, minx-like, but wholesome-hearted sister Lottie, who is drawn to the life. One wearies of having her for alleged spiritual qualities exalted above her sister, who is a tower of moral strength by comparison, and who for all her wilful ways certainly causes her parents no such grief. We again discover our author in an attitude of worship before what should be the object of his satire. That this maudlin business does not lack an appreciative audience is proved by the remarks of Professor William Lyon Phelps, who finds something very

fine in the fact that Lottie, with her lively charm for men, is retired as "an admirable wife and housekeeper,"[1] while Ellen, whose lack of such charm is lamented, is left "preserving in her wealthy environment all the fruits of the spirit."[1] The shade of the moral Richardson is abroad, I think; but are such the gods of realism?

When Mr. Howells begins to ascribe New England consciences to the inhabitants of Ohio and Iowa, and puts young men through the self-torturing antics of sentimental maids, the suspicion already aroused that he is no longer studying in an attitude of detachment a special problem of humanitarian interest, but has himself fallen into the clutches of sentimentalism, receives dark confirmation. Letters Home (1903) appears in epistolary form, notwithstanding his declaration, apropos of Richardson in Heroines of Fiction, that nobody writes novels in letters any more. The New York career of Wallace Ardith, the young literary man from Iowa, has a striking merit in making transparently clear the fact that this morbid quest after righteousness may well be productive of more suffering than a thoroughly selfish course. That, of course, seemed clear enough from the conduct of the sisters Kenton, where all woes had their genesis in the "spiritual" and unselfish one. But there we found enough contrived to extol this "spirituality," Professor Phelps applauding, completely to obfuscate the problem. Letters Home is more lucid, but does not take us back to Dr. Breen's Practice and An Imperative Duty, where, with a special problem of Puritanism in hand, Mr. Howells left us in no manner of doubt as to his attitude. He does not here, indeed, in the case of Miss Dennam, a contemporary Puritan from a village in western New York settled by New England people. Her metropolitan experiences tear

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[1] "William Dean Howells" in Essays on Modern Novelists.

some very ragged fringes in her principles. In the case of "dutiolatry" farther from a visible source, however, he is uncertain where to fix the responsibility, and seems to lay it all to fate.

Of the latest phase of Mr. Howells' work, his return in reminiscent mood and with the historian's intent to his native Ohio, I shall speak later. If we may judge by the fair prophecy of his new and virile novel, The Leatherwood God (1916), it will prove wholly fortunate. Happy that he has thus given signal of recrudescence! for his fiction since The Son of Royal Langbrith (1904) had run a swift decadence. Miss Bellard's Inspiration (1905) and Fennel and Rue (1908) represent his work in its greatest excess of psychological method, though the former offends rather by the frivolity of its structure than in its surgery. Fennel and Rue is not a joke on the reader, as Miss Bellard's Inspiration is, but it is an unrelieved piece of vivisection, falser in its totality than any other of the novels.

The execution of Miss Bellard's Inspiration is superb, but conception it had none. The technique is of a quality with that of the farces, but it ends not with the logic of a farce but with a mere play on words. The objection is that no author has a right to do that in a novel without in some manner advertising the fact. It is like a pianist's giving his scales in public recital. We find here assembled Mr. Howells' repertoire of whimsical variations on the themes of love and marriage rendered with a virtuosity that precludes ennui, even though we feel the substructure dissolving into thin air.

The greater part of the minor action is illustrative of the innate contrariety of women. The major theses are two: that love is a bar to marital happiness after the first stages have been traversed, and that intellectuality avails nothing in combination with femininity.

In support of the latter, Miss Lillias Bellard, lecturer on oratory in a Western college, is offered, while the sad case of Mr. and Mrs. Mevison, who are loving and fighting each other toward a final separation under the hospitable roof of the Crombies, is ample evidence for the former. They are reminiscent of the Alderlings in Though One Rose from the Dead; in fact, theirs is a theme upon which Mr. Howells feels deeply. "Love," he told A. Schade Van Westrum, "is for the springtime of life; in maturity it pales, in the most fortunate cases into a beautiful friendship, into loyalty rewarded by contentment, which is a more enduring prize than the ill-defined state vaguely described as happiness."[1] To the objections of his interlocutor, who cited the heroes and heroines of Paul Bourget and Tolstoi, he replied what we have heard before, that conditions are different over there, and objected in turn to having his theory called one of "arrested development," suggesting the milder term "inhibitive environment." Now, Miss Bellard, intellectual, emancipated, knowing that she and Mr. Claybourne love each other too much, and with the horrible example of the Mevisons before her, not to mention the "sweet intimacy" of her aunt and uncle, does not yield easily. She heartlessly insists that there can be no room for two such couples in the world, and they must learn to love each other much less before the union can be thought of, until suddenly she has an inspiration. The logical argument by which she appeases her intellect, is Mr. Howells' neatest compliment to the emancipated woman.

A completely domesticated man is Mr. Howells, who likes to read plays in his arm-chair better than to go to the theatre. George

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[1] "Mr. Howells on Love and Literature" in Lamp (1904), 28: 28-29.

Moore's vision of him, which must in that day have been intended to confer a final damnation, is essentially and strikingly true, much truer than the rather inept aphorism about his indebtedness to Henry James so often quoted.

> "I see him the happy father of a numerous family; the sun is shining, the girls and boys are playing on the lawn, they come trooping in to a high tea, and there is dancing in the evening."[1]

For all that he has made of love in its springtime, he is more successful with age. His young lovers never compare in effectiveness with the elderly pair in the background, or, by rare good fortune, as in his stronger novels, like The Rise of Silas Lapham or The Son of Royal Langbrith, in the foreground. The Kentons, who have attained that beautiful state of contentment which is the prize of loyalty, are the clou of their book, without which Ellen's lovesickness would have no meaning, and the Dryfooses, and the Gaylords, many others come trooping up.

The trouble with his lovers is an utter lack of passion. Passion is constitutionally abhorrent to Mr. Howells, as abhorrent as Mr. Moore declares respectability to be. Christine Dryfoos, in a A Hazard of New Fortunes is the only person I can recall from all his works who is conscious that she has a body. Hence, his superior success with older persons, or with the young in their very mild flirtations, and his search for another name than love to express the sense of sympathy and mutual dependence which is one of the sweetest fruits of long life together. The geographical argument is less intelligible, but like his scorn of climaxes, it is thoroughly characteristic of his tendency to theorize away his self-imposed limitation in subject matter.

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[1] The Confessions of a Young Man, pp. 143-44.

It has been objected that especially in their treatment of love, Mr. Howells' novels give an effect of unreality, but it is a great mistake to seek the cause in his conventionality either of material or method. In fact, the most insistent impression left by these novels in their totality is one that has received no adequate expression in the voices of Mr. Howells' critics, whether through lack of acquaintance with his theory or through too restricted an acquaintance with the novels themselves--that the spirit informing them is essentially a spirit of literary criticism and only after that a criticism of life. The criticism of life is ordinarily sound and fine, voiced by a keen and indefatigable observer; hence, this condition of its inspiration must not be taken to imply that Mr. Howells writes from the closet. He has been in close contact with the life he pictures, but in his function as realistic novelist, he has embraced that contact with the spirit of an evangelist. And no missionary was ever content with the eternal verities. The result in his work is that, not content to record life as he sees it, he must need record it as others, inclusively branded romanticists, do not see it. Most of the faults observable, so far from indicating a writer who has espoused a cause to be "in the movement," are left by a talent that overleaps itself in an excess of zeal. The matter of love is a capital case in point. It is altogether wrong to designate his frequent lapses into conventionality as tags and fringes of a "romanticism" his by nature but not completely eradicated, when his doctrine of love, viewed in its entirety may be formulated so as destroy precept upon precept the traditional creed. The stupidity of his lovers, for example, which makes it all but impossible for them to know that they are in love, seems to be the effect of uncontrollable aversion on the author's

part to the notion of love at first sight. He is excessive in his eagerness to demolish the superstition that young women find great joy in the interval before marriage. The virtues of faithfulness and self-sacrifice as they are extoled in Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray, he finds often unsocial and unhumane. Faithfulness after death, such as that of Helen Pendennis, fills him with inextinguishable wrath.

Mr. Howells, in the process of spoiling many of his own stories in his anxiety to show the obverse of the medal, has had one of his most salutary effects on contemporary fiction in making us critical of traditional notions, many of them handed down from Ovid, through the courtly singers of Provence, and the whole line of mediaeval romancers, some of origins less remote. The notion of love as a mystic power which binds two human beings forever and beyond the grave is his bête noir. This, if anything, has a historical claim upon the term, so sinister from his pen, "romantic," invoking as it does what images of chivalry and courts of love. The knight beholds his lady at her casement, and knows from the instant that they have been united in heaven, that he must serve and worship her for years until he win her, that if either die it will be most beautiful to follow, or at least to live a whole life long in wretchedness. If the lady have a husband, what divine consolation to know their passion cannot injure him, since double matches are not made in heaven! It is not without historical propriety that we stigmatize as "romantic" those fictions thich exist to proclaim an ennobling effect for the most vulgar liasons.

Equally violent has been Mr. Howells' revulsion from grand climaxes, dreadful catastrophies, and startlingly contrived coincidences, and equally variable have been the results upon his own fiction. He has accomplished an inestimable service in stimulating the

critical sense of writers and readers, but he has vitiated many a good story in a spirit of sheer bravado. I have mentioned a number of instances in which he has wilfully withdrawn every external support from his action. No other realist has carried this exaltation of the character element to such a preposterous length, certainly not Jane Austen, nor Valdés. Valdes, indeed, has given us a charming love story in José with the obstacles to happiness completely externalized, the characters being given, and exhibited only as the situation calls them forth. This is the fundamental truth about the weakness of Mr. Howells' characters, so often complained of: they are subnormal because in the absence of obstacles to overcome it requires subnormal people to make a story. An older interpretation made Hamlet insane; some commentators still find his tragedy in vacillation and delay; but a newer and better reading has discovered the heart of his mystery in the inexorable difficulty of his situation. And though one may feel the limitations of such simple-hearted stories as José, one has in them a satisfaction that April Hopes with its protracted beating in the void cannot yield.

In leaving these transcripts of American life to consider others less blemished by propagandism in its protean forms, and giving his beliefs their finer, and in the happiest instances their final proof, we should do wrong not to render homage to the national spirit which receives expression in them. Being the product of a mind tireless in the contemplation of our life throughout the most significant period of its history, their historical value is inestimable; and proceeding from a heart cherishing so dearly the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity which actuated our forefathers, they constitute the only large and significant body of fiction inspired by

the spirit of American democracy. Mr. Howells has not actually expressed the four million with the intimacy of O. Henry. He has spoken for them rather than with them, but he stands alone in his noble rage against the plutocracy and aristocracy which have been given a foothold upon our soil, the chief contemporary exponent of the democracy voiced in our Declaration of Independence.

VII. STUDIES IN ETHICS

The reader of the foregoing chapter will not be slow to detect the heresy implied in selecting a comparatively small group of Mr. Howells' novels as his contribution to the subjects of social and political ethics. No repudiation, however, is intended either of the principle that moral truth may find embodiment in chronicles innocent of violence, or of the fact that Mr. Howells in the totality of his work as well as in the supreme reaches of his art has fulfilled the promise of his critical message, with its indissoluble fusion of ethics and aesthetics. It is rather the final proof of his wisdom that the most artistic of his productions are those most profound in their moral effect. Among his stories, all pretty much of a piece, those which reverberate most loudly to the voice of duty, in which the characters live in eternal questioning of the rightness or wrongness of their actions, are the ones which, when final judgment shall be rendered, will live as pictures of our society, as transcripts of manners rather than studies in human character. In Ragged Lady, for example, the conscience problem is handled in a specialized condition and an essentially picturesque aspect, while in The Son of Royal Langbrith the matter for all its local coloring has a universal applicability. The questions of human happiness in the latter novel enlist the reader's effort at solution, while the difficulties in the former are phantoms fought by the characters alone. The weak-

ness is simply the weakness of structure already noted. Likewise, though the ideal of democracy has constantly guided his pen, which limns in so relentlessly the blemishes upon the face of our national life, a distinction must be drawn between the delineation of aristocratic insolence and the less entertaining but more seriously promulgated preaching of social equality.

The two themes are scarcely separable in Mr. Howells' novels; but the artistic results are by no means on a parity, as we shall see. Their alliance in genesis is especially close, some of the New England moralists having exchanged their personal daemons for a race conscience, or, in the most unhappy cases, having rather illogically retained the problem of their own souls' salvation while shouldering the burdens of all humanity. In the New York novels, A Hazard of New Fortunes (1889) and The World of Chance (1893), we emerge into a clearer atmosphere where the advanced ethical conceptions, for which in the New England novels ministers of the gospel stand spokesmen, are mouthed by venerable and eccentric socialists. But already in Annie Kilburn (1888) the point had been made clearly; perhaps Mr. Howells has never made it more dramatically, and with a preacher for a hero!

The superior excellence of Annie Kilburn, artistically and polemically, over The Minister's Charge (1887) resides in the superior intelligence of all its characters, but especially of the protagonist, the Reverend Mr. Peck, whose tragedy lies in the victory of his humanitarianism over his orthodoxy, while in the soul of the Reverend Mr. Sewell, who will be remembered by readers of Silas Lapham, the consciousness that he is his brother's keeper works an awful and ineffectual spell. The motives of either book are light, but in Annie Kilburn they are clear and tangible, the action being in

concrete illustration of the argument, whereas the plot of The Minister's Charge, enacted by a minister whose obfuscated brain is a prime hinderance to practical helpfulness and a charge stupidly and stubbornly opposed to being helped, illustrates only what lidicrous applications can be made of the principle preached by the Reverend Mr. Sewell, "that no one for good or for evil, for sorrow or joy, for sickness or health, stood apart from his fellows, but each was bound to the highest and lowest by ties that centered in the hand of God."[1]

Perhaps the worst thing to be held against Sewell is his devotion to his wife (those who cavil at the Howells women should look upon the reverse of the medal and declare whether or not one can hold in higher regard the men who spend their lives dancing attendance upon them); but his responsibility for Lemuel is undertaken against her better judgment, when he praises some verses the country lad has written. So much are we our brothers' keepers that thereupon Mr. Sewell's is the blame that Lemuel comes to Boston, lighted by false fires, and has all his dreadful experiences there. Even should we accept this, or should we while denying it attempt to learn about society from Lemeul's career, we are confronted by the same type of exaggeration. His notions of social equality are as eccentric as his guardian's; his sense of guilt as unusual. He loses appetite and starts into a decline after kissing a young girl, feeling himself "guilty of an enormity that nothing could ever excuse."[2] Even should we accept him as a subnormal type, moreover, there remain the objective difficulties noted in the case of Helen Harkness, whose antipathy to money he shares: his effect upon the normal characters is an insuperable tax upon the imagination. He

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[1] The Minister's Charge. (1887), p. 458.

[2] Ibid., p. 167.

seems to fascinate Bostonians the most disparate in social rank and intellectual constitution, none of whom seem seriously disturbed by his smug, priestly ways. Bromfield Corey, with whom he secures a position as reader, says after he has disappeared: "All my moral and intellectual being has stopped like a watch."[1] Bromfield Corey, readers of Silas Lapham will recall as the type of aristocrat, which makes his conduct not particularly apposite to the theme of social inequality. Mr. Howells is again the victim of misdirected sympathies; and, as if in proof that evils come not singly, he has again introduced romantic fiction as one of the corrupting influences upon his characters.

Annie Kilburn is a more wholesome and a more informative book. The New England conscience lives on in Annie, but with a sea-change, for she has taken her Italy easily and naturally in an eleven years residence abroad with her father, not in a volcanic but ineffectual revolt against herself, as Grace Breen took hers. She returns to her native land a Puritan still, but a Puritan amenable to common sense, and finds South Hatboro' electric with new ideas. An organization for social betterment known as the Social Union is on foot, and in the efforts of the Reverend Mr. Peck the new religion of social service is finding its expression. But the two forces are not at all in accord, Mr. Peck, with his ideal of social equality, being presently brought into active conflict with the Union, with its old ideal of charity, which does so little beyond confirming the rich in their vanity and snobbishness and the poor in their discontent. Annie, who wants to do good with her money, finds her natural alliance with the Union, and is made, even as all Hatboro', extreme-

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[2] The Minister's Charge. (1887), p. 430.

ly uncomfortably by Mr. Peck. She cannot see the impossiblity of friendly intercourse between the poor and their benefactors, having often heard her father say "that the great superiority of the American practice of democracy over the French ideal was that it didn't involve any assumption of social equality."[1] She demands of Mr. Peck:

"Then you mean to say that people can't do any good at all with their money?"

"Money is a palliative, but it can't cure. It can sometimes create a bond of gratitude perhaps, but it can't create sympathy between rich and poor."

"But why can't it?"

"Because sympathy--common feeling--can spring only from like experiences, like hopes, like fears. And money can't buy these."[2]

Injured orthodoxy and commercialism has its most interesting protagonist in Mr. Gerrish, who will appear again in The Quality of Mercy. His arraignment of the minister after the fatal sermon on the Union theatricals is a masterly disquisition, fully to be appreciated only by those acquainted with Mr. Gerrish.

"Understand me, sir, we do not object, neither I nor any of those who agree with me, to the preaching of Christ as a life. That is all very well in its place, and it is the wish of every true Christian to conform and adapt his own life as far as--as circumstances will permit of. But when I come to this sanctuary, and they come, Sabbath after Sabbath, and hear nothing said of my Redeemer as a--means of salvation, and nothing of Him crucified; and when I find

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[1] Annie Kilburn (1888), p. 64.

[2] Ibid., p. 65.

the precious promises of the gospel ignored and neglected continually and--and all the time, and each discourse from yonder pulpit filled up with generalities--glittering generalities, as has been well said by another--in relation to and connection with mere conduct, I am disappointed, sir, and dissatisfied, and I feel to protest against that line of--of preaching."[1]

In A Hazard of New Fortunes (1889), Mr. Howells transfers his scene to New York and spreads an epical canvass. The longest and most complicate of his novels, it has nevertheless proved one of the most popular, and justly so. A vital reason for his success with it lies in the fact that he has furnished himself for the first time with materials lavish enough for the easy and natural attainment of that loose and ample structure which he so admires in the work of Zola and the elder Spaniards. Except in The Landlord at Lion's Head he was hardly again to fulfill his own formula so perfectly, although he has rather exceeded the prescription in the matter of action, the moral regeneration of Dryfoos the capitalist being brought about by the violent death of his son Conrad. The vast number of personages who share in its events, their destinies united now by slender threads and now by bonds of steel, enable him to convey better than he has elsewhere been able to convey it, that feeling for life's confusion and complexity which has ever engaged his artistic sense.

Such a condition, furthermore, is as happy for the polemic interests of the book as for the artistic. It affords an escape from the sentimental mood, perhaps the prevailing mood of sociological fiction, which limits the end of so much humanitarian writing to making well-to-do people vaguely uncomfortable, which makes such an

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[1] Annie Kilburn (1888), p. 273.

innocent production as Galsworthy's Pigeon more depressing to the philosophic mind than the ghastly tales Arthur Morrison tells of Mean Streets. Mr. Howells is most addicted to futile musings when he loses himself in sympathy with his ordinary, well-to-do, somewhat sensitive people. Accordingly, it is significant for the present work that the Marches, ostensibly the central figures, are lost in the welter. They are brought to New York for the purpose of reacting to the social and economic cruelties of metropolitan life, and obediently come "to excel in the sad knowledge of the line at which respectability distinguishes itself from shabbiness,"[1] and to suffer at the sights they see in tenement streets; but they are forced into their proper place in the picture, which is the background, by the multiplicity of more interesting and more rugged types.

From these characters, limned with a virile touch, however, there is an omission of representatives of the very low classes, which constitutes the outstanding deficiency of Mr. Howells' view of our society. He once remarked, I believe, that New York could not furnish Dostoievsky with materials, a point which he would surely not care to press, but which may in any event be dismissed with his notion that the sexual instinct does not find the expression here that it does abroad. Mr. Howells does not like passion, and he does not like humanity unwashed. But he does love humanity in the abstract; so, while passion is banished utterly from his stage, the great unwashed cry incessantly behind the scenes. They have able spokesmen in characters like the venerable German socialist Lindau and the "bourgeois intellectual" Conrad Dryfoos, but they themselves do not appear, at least in any very painful guise. There is too much Basil

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[1] A Hazard of New Fortunes (1891), vol. 1, p. 71.

March in the author. He shrinks from concrete suffering, and asks us to shed tears over the general fact that people are hungry. When we actually see a poor wretch pick a crust from the gutter, he leaves us in the belief with which March consoled his wife, that it was after all only a mendicant's ruse for eliciting sympathy. This is really far more discomforting than a knowledge of the fact could be. Mr. Howells would gain vastly in effectiveness both as reformer and artist by sacrificing, in addition to his customary effusion of sentiment, his aloofness from the unpleasant. A descent into the depths of degradation would actually put a note of cheer into his message, a note of hope; for, as he has so often told us, there is consolation and delight in the truth, and only in the truth.

He has also told us that in its apostleship to the lowly, realism inherits the better part of romanticism; but the extent to which he has in fact improved the heritage invites question.

"The romantic spirit," he noted long ago, "worshipped genius, worshipped heroism, but at its best, in such a man as Victor Hugo, this spirit recognized the supreme claim of the lowest humanity. Its error was to idealize the victims of society, to paint them impossibly virtuous and beautiful; but truth, which has succeeded to the highest mission of romance, paints these victims as they are, and bids the world consider them not because they are beautiful and virtuous, but because they are ugly and vicious, cruel, filthy, and not altogether loathsome because the divine can never wholly die out of the human."[1] Mr. Howells has not indeed painted the victims of society as beautiful and virtuous, but neither has he shown their viciousness, their cruelty, and their filthiness. He has not reveal-

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[1] *Criticism and Fiction*, p. 183.

ed how the spark of the divine smoulders in places dark and vile. A more searching scrutiny of these places than the fathers of humanitarianism gave has had its effect on him, not merely in making him conscious of the meanness that is there, but in shaking his faith in the goodness that is there. This state of mind, while not fatal, is exceedingly unfortunate--the loss of faith in the essential nobility of human nature, in its eternal capacity for regeneration, and with the artist already a slave to his native reticence in the depiction of ignobleness and degeneracy. It impersonalizes his view of the lower ranks, inducing a general and unlocalized pain, a shrinking from actuality, a hatred of all suffering whatsoever, so that when he does come to a philosophy, he thinks in vacuo as surely as William Godwin, Tom Paine, and the other romantic humanitarians ever did.

Strange figure of a perfectibilian harassed by doubts as to the perfectibility of the human soul! He has not reinterpreted the Declaration of Independence, but reaffirmed it; a burning reaffirmation, but a half-hearted allegiance to the doctrine which inspired it. The result throws a burden upon society which Victor Hugo never contemplated. We are our brother's keeper not merely in the sense that branded the first murderer, but in a sense that would make Abel responsible for his own fate. That the only tenable ideal of a perfect society is one in which the strong support their weaker brethren, and in which all stand equal before each other and before their God, is a fact that no one living in our century should deny; but it is equally true that such an ideal will not be realized in our century and perhaps for many to come. Our duty lies, therefore, not merely in accepting it, but in recognizing in it a far goal toward which the democratic spirit is gradually bringing the race. It cannot be reached save by a slow evolution, a struggle, cheerfully and joyously to

be waged, for it is idle to declare that all men are equal and lament that they are not so, to declare that society is cruel and unnatural because it is obviously imperfect.

Mr. Howells in his more optimistic moments recognizes this condition, which makes all the more unreasonable his discouragement. In an essay on equality as the only tenable basis of good society, he makes it very clear that the world is growing better for the very reason that we have more and more of that good society which does not take a shabby pleasure in inequality, but which finds its satisfaction in getting on common ground with others. "As nearly as we can conceive it or forecast it," he says, "the new condition, the equality of the future, will be the enlargement of good society to the whole of humanity. This seems to me so not only because, so far as we have social equality, it has grown out of human nature, but because we have already more of that equality than any other."[1] Does this not suggest the natural process by which enlightenment is disseminated? Why then, in the same essay, should Mr. Howells be disturbed by the man who stands behind his chair at dinner, or by the richer man who sits across the table? Why should the Reverend Mr. Peck be taken off by a railroad accident the moment it becomes imminent that either his ideas or those of his parishioners must prevail? Why should Mr. Wallace Ardith in Letters Home be pitied for the misery he causes even more than his victim? Because Mr. Howells is frightened at the notion of holding the individual responsible either for good or evil. It is so convenient to lay everything at the door of that great ogre Society.

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[1] "Equality as the Basis of Good Society," in the Century (1985), 29:67.

Mr. Howells minimizes constantly the value of individual effort; and the enlargement of the spirit of good society to all humanity being so transparently conditioned by the spiritual growth of individuals, of which legislation can only be the ultimate expression, his social philosophy, I fear, must be left in some such state as that to which his theory of criticism was reduced. The reader may recall the odd figure to which his attention was directed of a critic industriously expounding literature through the decades, chiefly concerned in maintaining the utter futility of such employment. Here we find him zealous in another cause dear to his heart, and in a like manner discarding the instrument of its prosecution. The really ardent reformers in his novels all die ineffectual deaths, most of them violent deaths. In their taking off the gentle Conrad Dryfoos and the patriarchal Lindau of A Hazard of New Fortunes bear the benediction of martyrdom, but Ansel Denton in The World of Chance perishes by his own hand in a delirium brought on by his obsession with socialistic notions. In his work as an engraver, he has hit upon an invention, a new art process that will make him rich. He obeys the inner voice and destroys his work through fear that it will throw some other engravers out of work, but the sacrifice is not enough. Some innocent life must be paid in expiation of the crime; but, frustrate in his attempt to take that of his sister-in-law, Peace Hughes, he ends his own guilty one with prussic acid--the most lurid scene in all Mr. Howells' pages. And it is made perfectly clear that the more intelligent efforts of his father-in-law come to no more fruitful, though a more peaceful end.

The exoneration of the individual and the attribution of his misdeeds to the social order, an order which individual effort seems powerless to better, is the underlying purpose of The Quality

of Mercy (1892). On the whole an impressive chronicle, with its searching and implacable inquiry after the far-reaching consequences of its hero's crime, it nevertheless offends more gravely than either The World of Chance or A Hazard of New Fortunes in the maudlin pity spilled over him. Northwick, the absconding defaulter, is represented as a man with instincts toward the highest integrity, but cast into a world where supposedly honorable men very frequently take other peoples' money and find themselves unable to pay it back. By early training he believes in the moral government of the universe, and thus, from the religious point of view, is presented as a horrible example of the futility of that belief as a guide to conduct. The whole trouble with him is an environment which makes his sort of robbery possible. Says Matt Hilary, the softest of the tribe of millionaire socialists whom Mr. Howells has called into being: "Northwick isn't the disease; he's merely the symptom."[1] And Putney: "He was a mere creature of circumstances--like the rest of us! His environment made him a rogue. Sometimes I think there was nothing to Northwick, except what happened to him."[2] And so the matter is developed at great length by Maxwell, the philosophic journalist of the Abstract, who is rather overdone as a foil to Bartley Hubbard of the flashy and vulgar Events. The message of The Quality of Mercy, aside from its multitude of faithful and painstaking subsidiary studies, is that the social body is sick; but Mr. Howells is its anatomist, not its physician.

The utopian romances A Traveler from Altruria (1894) and Through the Eye of the Needle (1907) accentuate the difficulties of

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[1] The Quality of Mercy (1892), p. 166.

[2] Ibid., p. 474.

Mr. Howells' sociology, but make delightful reading, since they enclose with the repertoire of current banalities the most exquisite portraits of their sponsors, and give rein to the sort of argumentative fantasy which enlivens The Seen and Unseen at Stratford-on-Avon, a diversion at which our author has scarcely been approached. At work of this kind he is always in the vein, and never permits the argument to spoil the fun. He cleverly forstalls criticism on the platitudinous character of his ideal state by introducing at the lecture of the distinguished voyageur, Mr. Aristides Homos of Altruria, a professor of economics, who is prompt to a marvel in pointing out the borrowings from Plato, More, Bacon, Campanella, Bellamy, and William Morris.

If A Traveler from Altruria emphasizes any feature of Mr. Howells' complaint against American conditions better than the novels, it is his wonderment at the apathy of the poor, who have the remedial agency at hand by which the Altrurians saved themselves alive from the tentacles of plutocracy--the ballot. "If the poor American," he maintained in an essay of about the same time as the Traveler, "does not like it, or if he does not prefer a plutocracy to a democracy, he has the affair in his own hands, for he has an overwhelming majority of the votes.....If we have a plutocracy, it may be partly because the rich want it, but it is infinitely more because the poor choose it or allow it."[1] Which ought to suggest to Mr. Howells a closer examination of how it came about that the Altrurians did not allow it, for he has taken great pains to draw the parallel perfectly between Altrurian and American conditions.

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[1] "Are We a Plutocracy?" in the North American Review (1894), 158:196.

The Altrurians, like the inhabitants of most visionary states, are palpably of a different clay from the humanity with which we have to deal. It is unnecessary to inquire whether or not their government would be desirable for America, since it would in any event be impossible. A helpful social philosophy will show not the vision of a New Jerusalem, but the steps by which it was attained. Such a philosophy will be bound to regard aristocracy as an inevitable stage in the progress of civilization, not as something unnatural to be swept away; but it will not be so short-sighted as to conclude that in view of the past service of aristocracy, we must have it always. In such a rational view, the duties of society to the individual will cease to appear antithetic to the responsibilities of the individual for himself and to the society of which he is a part. The ideal order will be offered as an ideal, not as a standard of comparison. As an ideal it spells hope, but as a present necessity it invites despair.

Mr. Howells, to draw consolation from his philosophy, must decrease his faith in the milennium and reconceive his notion of present efficacy. Such a reconception would not reveal in the social and economic world the operation of laws so exactly definable as those of the material world, but it would bring some order out of the chaos of The World of Chance.[1] Basil March, in A Hazard of New For-

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[1] Life is never the logical and consequent thing we argue from the moral and intellectual premises. There ought always to be evident reason in it; but such reason as it has is often crossed and obscured by perverse events, which, in our brief perspective, give it the aspect of a helpless craze. Obvious effect does not follow obvious cause; there is sometimes no perceptible cause for the effects we see. The law that we find at work in the material world is, apparently, absent from the moral world; not, imaginably, because it is without law, but because the law is of such cosmical vastness in its operation that it is only once or twice sensible to any man's experience. The seasons come and go in orderly course, but the incidents of human life have not the orderly procession of the seasons; so far as the sages or the saints are able convincingly to affirm, they have only the capricious vicissitudes of weather."--The Son of Royal Langbrith (1904), p. 282.

tunes, seems to voice Mr. Howells' desire:

"But what I object to is this economic chance-world in which we live, and which we men seem to have created. It ought to be law as inflexible in human affairs as the order of day and night in the physical world, that if a man will work he shall both rest and eat, and shall not be harassed with any question as to how his repose and his provision shall come. Nothing less ideal than this satisfies the reason."[1]

After Mr. March has proceeded to some length with a dismal picture of the capricious world we have created and maintain, his wife suggests that matters would be less uncertain were people not so greedy and so foolish.

"Oh, without doubt!" admits Mr. March, "We can't put it all on the conditions; we must put some of the blame on character. But conditions make character; and people are greedy and foolish, and wish to have and to shine, because having and shining are held up to them by civilisation as the chief good of life. We all know they are not the chief good, perhaps not good at all; but if some one ventures to say so, all the rest of us call him a fraud and a crank, and go moiling and toiling on to the palace or the poor-house. We can't help it. If one were less greedy, or less foolish, some one else would have, and would shine at his expense. We don't moil and toil to ourselves alone; the palace or the poor-house is not merely for ourselves, but for our children, whom we've brought up in the superstition that having and shining is the chief good. We dare not teach them otherwise, for fear they may falter in the fight, when it comes their turn; and the children of others will crowd them out of the palace

[1] A Hazard of New Fortunes (1891), vol.2, p. 252.

into the poor-house. If we felt sure that honest work shared by all would bring them honest food shared by all, some heroic few of us, who did not wish our children to rise above their fellows--though we could not bear to have them fall below--might trust them with the truth. But we have no such assurance; and so we go on trembling before Dryfooses, and living in gimcrackeries."[1]

Perhaps Mr. Howells has shown us too few of the people who do not tremble before Dryfooses and do not live in gimcrackeries. Those who in his novels wage war on Dryfooses and gimcrackeries do so for the most part after his own manner. Impatient of the slow processes of enlightenment, they offer us perfection or nothing--and fail. There is no reason for discouragement in the fact that human effort does not work with the precision of a mechanical or a chemical process, as Altrurian effort does. There is no reason why Mr. Howells should doubt the influence of his father's newspaper, almost the sole intellectual force operating in his community.[2] There is no reason why the recrudescence of historical romance in which the last century closed should have caused him to despair for literature.[3] The infection was already losing its hold when he spoke, and quickly subsided. Time has also given proof of the unreasonableness of his despondency in yielding the fight waged through the "Editor's Study." Reporting his conversation with Mr. Harper, he says:

"I believe that we agreed the effect had been injurious to my books, which had not been so well liked or so much bought as they had been before I began my long fight. The worst of it--I did not

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[1] A Hazard of New Fortunes (1891), vol. 2, pp. 253-4.

[2] "The Country Printer," in Impressions and Experiences (1896).

[3] "The New Historical Romances" in the North American Review (1900), 171:935.

then perceive, or know that my long fight had been a losing fight; I perceive now that the monstrous rag-baby of romanticism is as firmly in the saddle as it was before the fight began, and that it always will be as long as the children of men are childish."[1]

The worst of his sentimental reverence for humanity, his horror of discomfort and incertitude in whatever form, Mr. Howells does not yet see. It blinds him to the workable ideals, the striving after perfection, which is the inspiration and the recompense of bloodshed. Is there nothing but suffering and revenge in Fenimore Cooperism and Walter Scottism.[2] "I find," says Mr. Howells of the new romances, "duels and battles set forth as the great and prevalent human events: I find pride and revenge worshipped as right and fine, but no suggestion of the shame and heartache which have followed the doers of violence in all times and countries since the stone age."[2] This is somewhat less than half the truth. In our own time and country, while we no longer celebrate the "pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war," we have uppermost in consciousness a sad realization of the fact that the ends of humanity and justice are still unattainable save by and through nationalism. A humanitarian who cannot now read his cause in the battle of the nations is outdated, impotent, and marked for despair.

Mr. Howells' remark that he expected no great literature to be the outcome of the present war because war is no longer our

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[1] "Mr. Howells on Rag-Babies," an editorial note in the Bookman (1912), 35:451.

[2] "The New Historical Romances" in the North American Review (1900), 171:939.

ideal was given considerable publicity during the autumn of 1914. It falls in pat with the tenor of his criticism, but has an ineptitude more serious than his arraignment of old-style war fiction. For it might as reasonably be maintained that since inequality is not our ideal, no great fiction could be expected as an outcome from the social and economic struggle which has been for him a fruitful field. Mr. Britling Sees It Through is at least as great a novel as The World of Chance, and no one could accuse Mr. Wells of offering war as an ideal, any more than Mr. Howells could be made the champion of aristocracy.

It is to his credit that Mr. Howells' pacifism has in the present crisis received some severe shocks. We are anxious only to forgive the mawkish message of his Editha[1], so false to fact that it would have us believe the veterans of the Civil War became pacifists, hard as it may be to forget that he has permitted it three times to see print. He has, however, no inspiration for our time. From victory he hopes something, but not very much. "From militarized Germany," he says, "from that dead corpse of medieval oppression, galvanized into an ecstasy of murder and rapine, humanity can hope nothing; but from England it can hope something, not everything, perhaps not much, but something."[2]

In the domain of personal ethics, Mr. Howells breathes a more inspiriting message, for if amid the destruction and the chaos through which the race of men are struggling toward brotherhood the God of Israel slumbers, man finds consolation and reward in being true to himself. However irrational the moral government of the uni-

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[1] In Between the Dark and the Daylight (1907).

[2] "Why?" in the North American Review (1915), 201:676.

verse may appear, the fact of sin remains ever with us, and "the agency which we must still call 'God' punishes it."[1] Mr. Howells uses "that quaint old word 'sin,' which has almost dropped out of our vocabulary, with a certain sense of its obsolescence, and perhaps of its original inaccuracy;"[2] but he finds proved on the experiential plane that its wages is death, and that goodness has its reward of inward peace. That is the reward of Dr. Anther in The Son of Royal Langbrith, when his long love story draws to its disappointing close, with the happiness that should have been his withheld--the rest to the soul. The happiness that comes for no particular merit to the son of Langbrith is seen to be a much less precious thing. For all that these novels confuse mercy and justice in regard to social offenses, no Calvinist ever preached consequences more irremediable to follow personal dereliction. This sharpens the sting of his attack on society, that it misleads with false lights and permits ignorance to go on.

The books Mr. Howells values most highly are those like Anna Karenina, I Malavoglia, and The Mill on the Floss, which show under the most ordinary circumstances, the truth of the conflict between desire for present happiness and the instinct to be good, which reveal the necessity of moral law for the individual. Veracity fulfils its supreme function in bringing home to us how inevitably we are part of the social order, whether that order be regarded as man-made or divine. If we are to be benefited by the perusal of a work of fiction, it will be by observing in the fortunes of the fictive people like capacities in ourselves. The novels of Robert Herrick,

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[1] "Robert Herrick" in the North American Review (1909), 189:814. [2] Ibid.

which he places among the foremost of those now being written, he finds admirable on this account, because of their power to bring us to shame for what we have become. "They are not only terrible," he says, "but they are terrifying in certain climaxes, such as that awful hour in 'The Common Lot,' when the architect who has 'stood in' with the jerry-builder sees the victims of his fraudulent construction drop into the roaring volcano which his 'fire-proof' edifice has become. As you look on with the wretched man, whose moral ruin has been so reasonable, so logical, you become one with him in your consciousness of like possibilities in yourself. When a novelist can do this with his reader, he has taken himself out of the category of futile villain-mongers and placed himself in the high, clear air where George Eliot discovered in our common human nature her immortal Tito."[1]

To picture forth the degeneracy latent in a selfish nature, to make that even more verifiable in our common nature than did George Eliot in Romola, was Mr. Howells' purpose in his first great novel, A Modern Instance (1882). It was surely this solicitude for verifiability, to convince his reader of like possibilities in himself, that led him to dispense with the stronger motivation which places Romola above the sort of questioning that A Modern Instance has invited. The prevailing criticism has been that the book is not clear in its impression, that it is under-motived, that Bartley Hubbard's beer-drinking does not signalize his disintegration of soul, that the catastrophe, while brought about by the reaction of character upon character, lacks inevitability. The charges are not altogether unjust, for there is no denying that Mr. Howells has here

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[1] "Robert Herrick" in the North American Review, p. 816.

been excessive in his desire to enforce his lesson that to be simply non-moral spells moral death as surely as to be immoral. The trouble is that the shrewd and unscrupulous so often succeed in the manner that Bartley Hubbard failed--socially and materially. In making Bartley consummately worldly, he may not have been really inconsistent, but he has raised the question as to why such a man should not succeed in the world. The Landlord at Lion's Head, presenting the same problem in a masterly manner, does not raise this question, for Jeff Durgin reaps the full reward of his worldliness, which makes the spiritual tragedy doubly impressive.

A subtler reason for the inferiority of A Modern Instance to The Landlord at Lion's Head lies in the fact that its hero's particular variety of worldliness combined with smartness constitutes a manifestation that arouses Mr. Howells' wrath more than his pity. For all his vaunted impartiality and detachment, he has taken a brief against the smart young man, the one American type utterly odious to him. Frechheit is his abomination, and in its protean guises he scourges it throughout a full third of his novels. The miserable little Dickerson in The Coast of Bohemia is perhaps the worst example of his kind. Beaton in A Hazard of New Fortunes, who is made to enact a fiasco-suicide in the Russian manner, represents the aesthetic egoist, but is not much different at heart from the salesmen and journalists. Bittredge, the pursuer of Ellen Kenton in The Kentons is Hubbard apotheosized; and while a poignant note of pathos is struck by introducing his fatuous mother, the pity is all for the mother, none for the offspring. Hubbard is accorded a more humane treatment than any of these, it is true; but his redeeming traits are difficult to locate, and he arouses no tithe of the sympathy one feels for Jeff Durgin.

One sure claim to immortality the book has in the figure of Squire Gaylord, the shrewd, quiet old lawyer of Equity, Maine, where Bartley comes to run his newspaper and much against his prophetic instincts to win his daughter Marcia. A Yankee of Yankees, Mr. Howells has never repeated his type to such perfection, which is to say that no one has done his type half so well, for he is strictly in Mr. Howells' métier. Whatever one may say of the sad matrimonial adventures of Bartley and Marcia, the real tragedy is his. No criticism can touch him, because his story is not a manipulation of life; it is life itself--the simple and living fact of heart-broken fatherhood. The court-room scene in which the old man, so near the grave, offers up his last strength in defence of his daughter is not merely the ineffaceable moment of this book but one of the strongest in all the books.

Very appropriately it is from the squire's lips that early in the story we are given the clue to its interpretation.

"Oh, you poor, crazy girl!" groaned her father. "Don't you see that the trouble is in what the fellow _is_, and not in any particular thing that he's done? He's a scamp, through and through; and he's all the more a scamp when he doesn't know it. He hasn't got the first idea of anything but selfishness."[1]

These words are spoken on that disgraceful occasion when, after the engagement has been broken, Bartley dismissed, and Marcia sent away to visit in the town where she used to go to school, she steals back in the night to tell her father that she cannot live without him. That is the trouble with Marcia--what she _is_, and not any particular thing she does. That is the disgrace of the scene--what the people

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[1] _A Modern Instance_ (1881), p. 110.

are, not what they do. It is a scene fraught with terror, the wholesome terror of unrealized possibilities, which Mr. Howells has found so salutary and has been so anxious to inspire. It was Mr. Hamlin Garland, if I remember correctly, who called Bartley Hubbard the modern substitute for a villain.

Emotionally susceptible readers find The Rise of Silas Lapham (1885) much less depressing than A Modern Instance. There can be little doubt that this story of more logically realized possibilities is the best beloved of Mr. Howells' works, though the record of sales does not, I believe, indicate the fact. Its superiority in point of art is hardly contestable; and, further than this, it immortalizes a type of American business man vastly more flattering to American readers than Bartley Hubbard. Not only more flattering, but, everyone is pleased to believe, more characteristic. Foreigners, indeed agree that the financier and industrial captain, quickly risen from obscure origins to colossal prosperity and power is a type distinctive of our civilization. Neither they nor we, however, always recognize as one of his characteristic traits an Anglo-Saxon love of fair play. He habitually regards his business as a game to be played honestly, and is not apt to be cruel and unjust without self-deception. He is often unfortunate in having the rules in his own making, but in his darkest scheming he does love the game beyond the prize. The interesting moment in his career is when, as his ambitions grow and widen, he encounters something which he wants--social position, usually, but maybe only a new way of looking at and enjoying life--but which seems to be not a part of his game. He cannot see why. Such is the experience of Dryfoos in A Hazard of New Fortunes, and of Ralston in Letters Home, but Silas Lapham epitomizes

the whole of this truly national drama. His magnitude embraces as well those lesser types of American business men, like the enterprizing Fulkerson of A Hazard of New Fortunes, but with the merely "smart" men of smaller ability and meaner egotism, the Bartley Hubbard's and better, he has little in common. This is admirably left in the reader's mind by the interview with which the book opens. While primarily intended to place Silas Lapham on exhibition in all his pride, this chapter exhibits the interviewer as fully; egoism meets egoism, but the merely flippant air of superiority is struck off against substantial achievement. A final reason for prizing The Rise of Silas Lapham, and perhaps the real secret of its popularity, is that it stands almost alone among Mr. Howells' novels with its theme of moral regeneration. Nothing could have been more fortunate than thus to have furnished the study of degeneration in A Modern Instance with its complementary theme as strongly handled, and to have shown that ghastly picture of marital unhappiness its obverse in the affection and loyalty of the Lapham family.

How strange that Mr. Howells, having devoted himself to the Russians, should remain skeptical of the capacity of human character for essential change and development, that he should have read the great novels like Crime and Punishment, The Resurrection, and War and Peace, his creative power unmoved by the redemption theme which is written so large in them! The extent of the liberty he allowed himself in Silas Lapham's case may be appreciated by recalling that of Dryfoos, where everything is done to persuade us that the capitalist was not really changed by his change of heart. "Does anything from without change us?" asks Basil March in his fashion of expounding his author's philosophy. "We're brought up to think so by the novelists, who really have the charge of people's thinking, nowadays.

But I doubt it, especially if the thing outside is some great event, something cataclysmal, like this tremendous sorrow of Dryfoos's."[1] His apology would no doubt be that nothing cataclysmal happens to Silas Lapham, and that Silas does not change but develops. Mr. Howells makes an exceedingly nice distinction between changing and developing, which is not at all clear to me, so I allow Mr. March to continue with his answer to Mrs. March, who very properly wants to know what in the world it is that changes us, since things without cannot.

"Well, it won't do to say, the Holy Spirit indwelling. That would sound like cant at this day. But the old fellows that used to say that had some glimpses of the truth. They knew that it is the still, small voice that the soul heeds, not the deafening blasts of doom. I suppose I should have to say that we didn't change at all. We develop. There's the making of several characters in each of us; we <u>are</u> each several characters, and sometimes this character has the lead in us, and sometimes that. From what Fulkerson has told me of Dryfoos I should say he had always had the potentiality of better things in him than he has ever been yet; and perhaps the time has come for the good to have its chance. The growth in one direction has stopped; it's begun in another; that's all. The man hasn't been changed by his son's death; it stunned, it benumbed him; but it couldn't change him. It was an event, like any other, and it had to happen as much as his being born. It was forecast from the beginning of time, and was entirely an effect of his coming into the world."[2]

At this point, Mrs. March interrupts her husband, and although she does not succeed in stopping him, she does provoke a con-

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[1] <u>A Hazard of New Fortunes</u> (1891), vol. 2, 318.

[2] <u>Ibid</u>.

fession that he doesn't know what it means either. Of course, Mr. Howells *in propria persona* expresses himself somewhat more circumspectly, but his opinions on crises as recorded by A. Schade Van Westrum are precisely those held by Mr. March.[1] Call it change or development, as you will, Dryfoos does not get far in the process and Silas Lapham does. As Mr. March says, Dryfoos's offer to sell *Every Other Week* on easy terms when he has no further use for it is no miracle of magnanimity; Silas Lapham's sacrifice of all his worldly interests in response to an awakened sense of honesty, and his return to the little Vermont town of his early struggles is a deeper thing. Silas has changed his view of life in the process of suffering. Not as Pierre Bezukhoi of *War and Peace* exchanged his, but certainly after a fashion observable in no other of Mr. Howells' heros.[2]

Mr. Howells' scorn of crises has left its finest effect upon *Silas Lapham* in the perfect naturalness with which the calamities are permitted to descend upon its hero's head. He declines to pursue the man as so many authors do. One has only to recall, say *The Vicar of Wakefield*, which he has so lavishly praised from time to

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[1] The intelligibility of these opinions I questioned in Chapter IV.

In *The World of Chance* (p.292) we are told: "Our common notion of tragedy is that it alters the nature of those involved, as if it were some spiritual chemistry combining the elements of character anew. But it is merely an incident of our being, and, for all we can perceive, is of no more vital effect than many storms in the material world. What it does not destroy, it leaves essentially unchanged." This remark is called forth by the circumstance that Mrs. Denton could talk and laugh with her father as always after the death of her babies and the horrible suicide of her husband. I doubt if there is any very common notion of tragedy that would deny her this. At any rate, Mrs. Denton shares no moral responsibility in the tragedy; she is a leaf in the storm, and the analogy with the material world is made to fit her case. A rhetorician would be certain to distinguish her as a pathetic, not a tragic figure.

[2] *The Rise of Silas Lapham* seems impossible of misinterpretation, but Mr. Howells records a curious judgment of Francis Parkman,

time, to feel the difference. There the author's hand is ruthless upon the shoulder of poor Doctor Primrose, pushing him from disaster into still more hopeless disaster. The only instance in which we catch Mr. Howells in the act of assisting tardy fate is when with specious cunning he burns the new house on the water side of Beacon Street. Save for this example of promptitude, the disasters accumulate with the delays and indirections which attend such matters in actual life.

The essential truth of the book, both in its universal aspect and in its faithfulness to American conditions, lies in the vital circumstance that Silas Lapham's innate honesty is made to contribute to his downfall. Equally true, though not equally consistent with his creator's practice, is the enlarging view of life which leaves him not merely with the peace and contentment which are the reward of doing right--that is a lesson characteristic of the many lives we have reviewed--but with a changed (or developed) nature, which can return to poverty after grandeur with patience and an unpredictable repose. One does not escape the feeling, I think, That Mr. Howells plumes himself in giving an air of finality to his hero's acceptance of the hard conditions which it has been his life's work to surmount. The year after Silas Lapham had come from the press, he

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so dedicated to realism in historical writing. "I remember his talking to me of The Rise of Silas Lapham, in a somewhat troubled and uncertain strain, and interpreting his rise as the achievement of social recognition, without much or at all liking it or me for it. I did not think it my part to point out that I had supposed the rise to be a moral one; and later I fell under his condemnation for certain high crimes and misdemeanors I had been guilty of against a well-known ideal in fiction. These in fact sonstituted lese-majesty of romanticism, which seemed to be disproportionately dear to a man who was in his own way trying to tell the truth of human nature as I was in mine. His displeasure passed, however, and my last meeting with " our greatest historian, as I think him, was of unalloyed friendliness. --Literary Friends and Acquaintance, p. 141.

blamed Balzac publicly for his leniency to César Birotteau, complaining: "It is not enough to have rehabilitated Birotteau pecuniarily and socially, he must make him die triumphantly, spectacularly, of an opportune hemorrhage, in the midst of the festivities which celebrate his restoration to his old home."[1] This is a little arbitrary, since, although Balzac does overdo César's honesty, at least in its effect on his creditors, there is fully as much reason in his rehabilitation as there is in Lapham's failure to retrieve his fortune. It is the more arbitrary, since in their strength, the books are alike. The inspiration that each has to offer is the spectacle of latent strength of character emerging under stress of adversity. The Parisian perfumer who becomes through what arduous stages the proprietor of a prosperous establishment, deputy-mayor of his arrondissement, and chevalier of the Legion of Honor, yields nothing to the American paint manufacturer in essential simplicity, in business sense, in vanity and hazardous social aspirations, but above all in that family affection which is the most warmly human feature of either chronicle.

It is odd that Mr. Howells should lavish such admiration upon Balzac'c imperfect pupil, Henry James, and remain so persistently cold and carping in his attitude toward the master himself. James's self-made man, Christopher Newman of The American, is like Birotteau and Lapham in his hard-earned wealth, and incidentally in having had his taste of military heroism, but is utterly unlike them in being neither an American nor a Frenchman. He is quite deracinated, attaches nowhere, and consequently lacks all the verisimilitude we prize in the others. His drama is purely, though powerfully, universal. The supreme moment when the bottom falls out of his contem-

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[1] "The Editor's Study" in Harper's Magazine (1886), 73:156.

plated revenge on the Bellegardes, when in the darkness of Notre Dame, after his walk through the Rue d'Enfer, he realizes that such things are not his game, is a spiritual crisis of universal import. But when one asks what is Christopher's game, his insufficiency beside César Birotteau and Silas Lapham becomes apparent. His aims are not verifiable in the American commercial world which he is supposed to represent. He is an aesthetic impressionist, who doesn't quite understand how to be one; and that is a game limited to the lesser Henry James's of our civilization. Money, which means so much to the American, though not half so much as to Balzac, whose novel has correctly been called not only a novel but a treatise of bankruptcy, affects neither Henry James nor his hero. All we are told of Christopher's business habits fails to win us from the belief that he inherited his fortune from some rich uncle. Especially amusing are his remarks on the difficulties of achieving the life of elegant leisure. If he is not an artist he is nothing; and he needs to be something else, for wealth like his is won by men like Silas Lapham, who glorifies the landscape with advertisements of his mineral paint, or like César Birotteau, to whom a picture of Hero and Leander suggests that the ancients did not put oil on their hair for nothing.

Mr. Howells has been as true to the economic and social conditions of our Reconstruction Period as Balzac was to the life of Paris during the Restoration. The rôle played by Mrs. Lapham, for example, is triumphantly American in its conception, just as that of Constance is perfect in its depiction of the Parisian bourgeoise, who presides at her husband's cash-desk and knows his daily sales to the sou. Henry James is not impressed by such matters; the Bellegardes of his novel, which does not touch common humanity, are more typical of French melodrama than of the French aristocracy. All of which

should serve to revive our reflections on Mr. Howells' prejudices and preferences.

In the optimistic air with which Lapham's calamity is consummated - not in the very end, which is obscured by the dispiriting presence of the Reverned Mr. Sewell with his eternal speculation on the mysterious ways of Providence - may be read the moral significance of his history. The repose in which his strong nature receives the worst is insensibly communicated to his family.

"In the shadow of his disaster they returned to something like their old, united life; they were at least all together again; and it will be intelligible to those whom life has blessed with vicissitude, that Lapham should come home the evening after he had given up everything to his creditors, and should sit down to his supper so cheerful that Penelope could joke him in the old way, and tell him that she thought from his looks they had concluded to pay him a hundred cents on every dollar he owed them."[1]

In his way Lapham has tasted consciousness of the elemental fact that we are part of the social order; and his cheerfulness is the cheerfulness of a capacity for acting his part in that order realized, just as truly as the bitterness which is Anna Karenina's portion is the bitterness of a capable soul whose part is denied and unfulfilled. The tragedy of Anna is that she finds by a thorny road, from which she is unable to extricate herself, what Maggie Tulliver divined,- that individualism doesn't work, except for souls with some essential meanness in their composition. Those who ask little of life commonly receive less, but they have the mean compensation of seldom discovering what is lost. Anna has asked much of life; she is a soul above

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[1] The Rise of Silas Lapham (1884), p. 495.

Emma Bovary, and infinitely above their swarm of lesser sisters who come to the same end. Consequently, when she discovers that Vronsky does not hold happiness for her, her disillusionment is a much vaster thing. It includes much more than her own fate, so much more that her death is only a personal culmination, which Tolstoi might or might not have given. Death and loss of fortune really have no vital importance as conclusions to two such histories of the spirit as Anna Karenina and The Rise of Silas Lapham. The fact that Silas Lapham does not retrieve his fortune is as inconsequent as that César Birotteau should rupture a blood vessel and die magnificently. When we come to The Landlord at Lion's Head (1897) we find so far as concerns Jeff Durgin, whose spiritual history is there recorded, no ending at all.

At the close of his book, Silas Lampham emerges captain of his soul, though mastered by fate; Jeff Durgin, unthwarted by fate, never discovers that he has a soul. Jeff asks only the attainable of life, and realizes but vaguely the failure of his success. His tragedy is a tragedy of incapacity, a complement in its way to Anna Karenina's, the supreme tragedy of capacity. The failure of the American youth is distinctly perceptible only to the observer of finer qualities than he - among his associates, Westover, the artist who comes up to the hills one late summer's day to paint the mountain known from its striking configuration as Lion's Head. Protracting his sojourn at the Durgin farm-house in order to complete his canvass in the deep evening light which lends the huge granite mass its most impressive aspect, he strikes up a tentative comradeship with the boy whose fortunes he is to follow through later life. If one could ask a finer perfection of a perfect book, it would be by way of an enhancement of Westover, who lives on with some of the traits common

to his author's earlier heros of the spiritual type. Jeff, however, is a success of a unique kind for Mr. Howells, who seldom makes us love characters of whom he does not approve. For all his selfishness and materialism, Jeff has manly virtues which would have aroused a more effective sumpathy in a manlier comrade than Westover. He has not merely strength of body and power of will, but a certain geniality, even joviality, before it is repressed by his disillusionment at Harvard. Westover is too much a part of Cambridge and Boston to appreciate him for what he is. The young man's coming to worldly wisdom, his belief in the wickedness of the beau monde, his appetite for scandal, synchronous with his taste for wine and the theatre, is a touching, a beautiful, and an inevitable thing; but it only disgusts Westover. Whether a finer tact would have aviled to instill truer notions of life is doubtful, but it would be facinating to see it fail as Westover's influence does fail. He succeeds only in convincing his young friend that his morality is an old-fashioned morality, and the young friend goes on with his own morality, which holds that "you pay, or you don't pay, just as it happens."[1]

Jeff is singularly qualified to get ahead without paying, which suggest that while it would have been hazardous to predict that Mr. Howells' most appealing character would turn out to be of his stamp, it might well have been prophesied that his greatest book would teach the lesson of his life, and teach it as it is taught in The Landlord at Lion's Head. Yet, now that it is done, one can hardly imagine its being done so perfectly without just such a person as Jeff. Having opposed as he has, the persistence in our fiction of a morality which bestows upon spirituality rewards not spiritual,

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[1]The Landlord at Lion's Head (1907, ed. 1908), p.309.

Mr. Howells was bound to show us in his most significant instance, not the selfishness punished by both outward and inward devastation, as he did in A Modern Instance, nor yet the serene triumph of honesty over material adversity, as he did in The Rise of Silas Lapham, but the sad insufficiency of the success which our world commonly allots to those mean enough to aim at individual happiness and strong enough to achieve it. This is to terrify us in the truest sense with what we are. And no novel ever revealed so searchingly the inconsequence of what we do. It is essentially a beautiful and a disturbing illumination of things not done. Jeff might have succumbed to drink, but he did not, for he had inherited along with his maternal grandfather's taste for wine a powerful will and a herculean constitution. He might have formed a vicious liaison with Bessie Lynde, but the validity and impressiveness of the Lynde episode are conditioned by the fact that he does not. He might have been a murderer, but he spared when he had him by the throat the man who had insulted and injured him. He might at least have committed arson, but his hotel, which he was quite capable of burning, burned by accident during his absence. Jeff's character is implacably delineated in view of his intentions and potentialities, for which things there is no place in his own scheme of morality. And this is precisely the capacity in which the art of Mr. Howells, with its scorn of crimes and climaxes, can touch deeply. Here he removes himself not only from "the category of futile villain-mongers," but from that of amateur political philosophers, and from that of delightful but somewhat insubstantial painters of manners.

Whether in the strictly contemporary phase of his work, his return for inspiration to the Middle-West from which he sprang,

Mr. Howells will produce another such novel as The Landlord at Lion's Head, who can say? New Leaf Mills (1913) did not encourage us to believe so, but in his latest work, The Leatherwood God (1916), he has given us something without a rival among his productions of the past twenty years, or at least with no rival save The Son of Royal Langbrith (1904). In the newer work he forsakes not only the psychological style that had begun so direly to afflict his writing, but the reminiscent strain in which New Leaf Mills had almost its entire body and being. The nationalistic motive inspiring The Leatherwood God is affectional rather than political; it limns the features of that primitive, ante-bellum civilization with tenderness; but the effect of the whole is to present an appealing picture of America in formation. In the genial agnostic, Matthew Braile, with his sense of justice and fair-play, with the infinite humanity that clothes his poor philosophy, and with the unconscious reverence in his nature, delicately touched, there is immortalized for early Ohio a type as verifiable as Squire Gaylord of New England. The story has its universal import as well, the career of Joseph Dylks the evangelist being symbolic of imposture in all times the world over.

It is gratifying to close our review of Mr. Howells' work in the hope, which there is much to justify, that his return in spirit to the West, whether or not it result in such a consummation in the new condition as we have just observed in the old, will evoke a still finer art than The Landlord at Lion's Head. For although too much can hardly be said in praise of that art, one must concede in it an excess of Westover, an excess of Boston. In his latest work his vision is less colored by New England, and not at all distorted as we noted it to be in The Kentons. He has never been less

provincial. And while it is hardly to be hoped that he will ever become like Mark Twain the voice of a people, it is not too late to expect greater novels than The Leatherwood God which shall share in the virtues of that chronicle. The late Howells will be free from literary self-consciousness. Untrammeled by sentimental musings and philosophic speculations, we may look for him to fulfill more perfectly than he has yet fulfilled it, the ideal of artistry which none has voiced better than he, which is the negation of the sentimentality from which his work actually suffers, even his major work in its secondary features, and which consists essentially in being simply true and human.

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